



Gleaning from New York State Farms to Benefit the Hungry: Overview and Recommendations

Executive Summary

The following report was designed to consider the needs, liability and logistics of New York State farmers. Farmers expressed an interest in seeing an increase in unsalable food from the farm donated directly to hunger relief agencies. Some recent projects and research focused on the benefits of farm gleaning efforts to the hungry, but tended to overlook the benefits and risks—especially liability for the farmer.

Additionally, we wanted to explore the role of Cornell Cooperative Extension, focusing on county associations with gleaning initiatives that include past, present, and future possibilities.

This project is an inventory (by no means comprehensive) of existing and recent farm gleaning efforts in New York State, as well as an exploration of what works and what needs tweaking.

Among our top findings is strong interest in expanding existing gleaning efforts. This interest comes from many sectors: farmers, hunger relief agencies, agricultural advocates, and so on. A few major limiting factors are: increasing knowledge about gleaning as an option, how to access gleaning programs, and suitable logistics for a successful gleaning effort. Among these logistical concerns: getting food to those that need it most in an economically viable manner, ensuring food safety, minimizing liability (especially for farmers), and preventing farmers from incurring additional expense.

The study also found that farmer liability, especially in allowing volunteer harvesters on private property, may be greater than many assumed. More examination is needed into the Emerson Good Samaritan Law. Increasingly, farmers seem interested in gleaning options that would allow for reimbursement of their own workers' time, or processing time, after donation of the food.

This report discusses several possible roles for Cornell Cooperative Extension, including serving as a “matchmaker” to bring together farmers and food banks promotion of gleaning opportunities, and nutrition and agriculture education. Cooperative Extension may also play a vital role in answering several research questions, such as determining the amount of food left unharvested, or unsold, per year; studying the relationship between processing plant capacity in New York State and food donation; and more.

Next steps for a farm gleaning effort in New York State likely include bringing together stakeholders for program development and priority-setting, securing funding for a project that allows for an expansion of food donations in New York State, as well as developing educational materials, promotion, and research issues.

1. Why This Report?

This report was inspired by New York State farmers who were interested in seeing an increase in donations of unsalable farm food to the hungry but wanted to better understand farm

gleaning. Recent projects and research focus on the benefits of farm gleaning efforts to the hungry but tend to overlook the benefits and risks, especially liability for the farmer.

This project is an inventory of existing and recent farm gleaning efforts in New York State, as well as an exploration of what works and what needs tweaking. The project is a collaborative effort of the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

2. Hunger and Food Pantry Use

The United States has long been known as a land of plenty—and paradoxically, a nation where hunger continues to plague the population. The United States Department of Agriculture estimated in 2009 that 14.7 percent of the population, or 17.4 million households, were “food insecure,” or “were, at times, uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food for all of the household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food,” (Nord, et al. 4).

Approximately one-third of food insecure households are classified by USDA as “very low food security.” 6.8 million households, or 5.7 percent of all U.S. households, experienced a range of food insecurity “in which the food intake of some household members was reduced and normal eating patterns were disrupted due to limited resources” (Nord, et al. iii).

National rates of food insecurity in 2009 were largely unchanged since 2008 and were the highest since 1995, when the government began tracking the data (Nord, et al. i).

New York State residents experience food insecurity at a somewhat lesser rate than the national average. The USDA estimated in 2009 that 12.9 percent of New York State households were food insecure; 5.1 percent of those households were classified as very low food security (Coleman-Jensen 7).

More than 50 percent of households that received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program food stamps, or free or reduced-price school lunches were classified as food insecure; 49 percent participated in the Women Infants and Children program, which provides specific food items for pregnant women and children age birth to five years old (Nord, et al. 32).

“Typically, households classified as having very low food security experienced the condition in seven months of the year, for a few days in each of those months” (Nord et al. iv).

Many of the households that turn to food pantries seem to be filling short-gaps in government and public service safety net programs; the majority seem to be looking to food pantries to alleviate short-term hunger emergencies.

“About 72 percent of households that obtained emergency food from community pantries were food insecure, and 39 percent had very low food security” (Nord, et al. 32).

Nationally, 5.6 million households, or 4.8 percent of the U.S. population, “obtained emergency food from food pantries one or more times during the (year). A smaller number—625,000 households (.5 percent)—had members who ate one or more meals at an emergency kitchen” (Nord et al. 34).

The eight regional food banks that comprise the Food Bank Association of New York State distribute food to 5,000 local food pantries, emergency food kitchens, low-income senior nutrition programs, and other hunger relief agencies. These efforts feed more than 3 million people annually, according to the Food Bank Association of New York State.

The 3 million meals served through the Food Bank Association of New York State does not reflect the total number of meals served via food pantries and similar organizations because a smaller number of local food pantries receive food from sources other than the regional food banks. These sources include local churches, community groups, and food drives.

3. How Much Food Goes to Waste?

Food losses—that is, edible food that does not make it the hands of hungry people—occur throughout the supply and marketing chains from farm to consumer, whether on the farm, in distribution, during food processing and manufacture, at the retail and foodservice level, or at home, by consumers themselves.

The United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization estimated in 2011 that 1.3 billion tons, or one-third of all food produced for human consumption, is wasted globally throughout the food supply chain (Gustavsson, et al. 4).

Even without firm numbers on how much food is lost at the farm, most experts seem to agree that a far greater amount of food is wasted as it moves up the marketing chain.

The United Nations estimated that in North America and Oceania (Australia and surrounding islands) per capita food loss from production to retail is 280-300 kg/year, and per capita food loss by consumers is 95-115 kg/year.

“In industrialized countries, more than 40 percent of food losses occur at the retail and consumer levels,” (Gustavsson, et al. 5).

In 1995, the USDA Economic Research Service estimated that “about 96 billion pounds, or 27 percent of the 356 billion pounds of the edible food available for human consumption in the United States, were lost to human use” (Scott Kanter, et al. 4) at the retailer, food service, and consumer marketing stages.

Two-thirds of lost/wasted food was fresh fruits and vegetables, milk, grain products, and sweeteners, including sugar and corn syrup (Scott Kanter, et al. 4). (The USDA reported that not all food lost was recoverable for human consumption.)

As food leaves the farm, it is subject to loss due to insect infestations, mold, spoilage, improper transportation, trimming in processing, and much more. Losses in food processing and manufacturing seem to be on the decline as processors develop new food products, or foster new revenue streams through composting, livestock feed, an industrial uses of edible products.

Food losses at the consumer level include food lost during meal preparation, cooking, food not consumed by its expiration date, spoilage, and plate waste.

4. Food Waste at the Farm Level

It’s important to include in any discussion of farm gleaning that not all of the food that does not make it to the food supply chain is necessarily considered a loss at the farm level.

Some farmers leave unharvested crops in the field to decompose and add organic matter back to the soil.

In fact, some crops, called cover crops, are grown not to be harvested, but to suppress weeds, add organic matter or nutrients to the soil, reduce erosion, reduce insect occurrence in fields, and more. Generally, cover crops are not varieties suitable for human consumption, but they can be wheat, rye, buckwheat, and others.

Another loss of food entering the supply chain that farmers may deem justifiable is food feed to livestock or even sold for livestock feed, albeit generally at prices below those of food-grade wholesale or retail. (In this case, much of the grains, produce, dairy, etc. feed to livestock eventually will make its way to the human food supply in the form of meat and dairy.)

How much food goes to waste at the farm level? It's difficult to know with certainty.

A 1997 report by the USDA Economic Research Service stated that "each year an average 7 percent of U.S. planted acreage was not harvested" (Scott Kantor, et al. 4).

The report concluded that the majority of unharvested acres were damaged by storms, including freezing and hurricanes, and that "most of these commodities are not recoverable for human use" (Scott Kantor, et al. 4).

A small percentage of unharvested crops may be fit for human consumption but left in fields because of a lack of a market for the crop, cosmetic blemishes, mechanical harvesting that leaves behind some crop, or other factors.

It is worth noting that even a small percentage of unharvested crops could equal thousands, or millions, of tons of food, in some years.

Determining the amount of food not harvested each year is difficult, in part, because government data tracks the principal crops by state, leaving many secondary-value food items untrack—especially fruit and vegetables. Additionally, government data often does not distinguish among crops grown for food versus fuel, livestock feed, or other uses.

5. Gleaning and Farm Food Recovery

Gleaning is an ancient concept, thought to date to Old Testament times, and carried through the medieval feudal system, when farmers and large landowners were encouraged or required by law to allow the poor to gather crops in the field after the harvest.

In contemporary times, gleaning generally refers to volunteers collecting food from fields and donating the goods to food banks or pantries that service the poor. The gleaned food may be left behind because of mechanical harvesting losses, cosmetic blemishes to the produce, lack of markets for the crops, and other reasons.

Gleaning in modern times may also refer to farm-food donations out of farmers' packing lines and storage houses.

Farmers in New York State donated 3.65 million pounds to food banks in 2009, according to American Farm Bureau, which tracks food donations through its Harvest for All program. (New York State leads the nation in farm donations to food banks, according to Farm Bureau.)

The 3.65 million pounds of food donated from farms in New York State includes beef, venison, eggs, dairy, and produce. The vast majority of donations, however, are fruits and vegetables, said Peter Ricardo, food procurement director for the Food Bank of Central New York.

Although the food banks do not keep statistics on exactly what is donated, Ricardo said, the majority of produce donated is comprised of apples, onions, potatoes, and cabbage, with lesser quantities of tomatoes, sweet corn, summer squash, winter squash, and other items.

Farm gleaning is traditionally viewed as field gleaning, but, increasingly in New York State the gleaning that does occur at the farm level comes off packing lines and storage houses.

“Generally the produce that is donated to us has been harvested but not sold. It may come right from the packing line or from cold storage,” said Joanne Dwyer, director of the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York.

New York farmers do donate directly from the fields, and donation efforts have taken on a variety of different forms, as will be described later in this report.

The food bank directors interviewed for this effort reported their organizations looked to New York farmers as sources of food for donation because the food is locally grown, farmers are perceived to be community-minded, and New York lacks the food processing and manufacturing facilities that are sources of donations in other states (Ricardo).

Food bank directors said there are obstacles to overcome in gathering donations from the farm, as will be discussed later, but that farms remain an attractive source of food for serving the needy.

“We have got to go to the source to get food donations. The more money that is invested in the product (as it moves through the supply chain), the harder it is to get it donated,” Ricardo noted.

6. Food Bank Food Sources

New York State is home to eight regional food banks organized through the Food Bank Association of New York State. The food banks are: Food Bank of Central New York (Syracuse), Food Bank for New York City, Food Bank of Northeastern New York (Albany), Food Bank of the Southern Tier (Elmira), Food Bank for Westchester (Millbrook), Food Bank of Western New York (Buffalo), Food Link (Rochester), and Long Island Cares (Hauppauge).

The Food Bank Association of New York State is associated with the nationwide Feeding America.

Together the eight regional New York food banks distribute food to 5,000 local food pantries, emergency food kitchens, low-income senior nutrition programs, and other hunger relief agencies. These efforts feed more than 3 million people annually, according to the Food Bank Association of New York State.

Food banks typically receive food donations from grocery stores, food manufacturers, wholesale brokers and distributors, and the government, with lesser quantities of food coming directly from individual and group efforts such as local food drives.

A quantity of food donated to New York's food banks comes directly from farms.

For example, the Central New York Food Bank receives 11.5 million pounds of food annually, 300,000 pounds of which comes from farms (Ricardo).

For operating expenses and to purchase food not donated, food banks rely on state, federal and private grants. New York State funding sources include Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, as well as other programs of the New York State Department of Health. Examples of federal funding streams include Community Development Block Grants, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Community Food and Nutrition Program, and the Emergency Food Assistance Program. Additionally, food banks receive monetary donations from individuals, churches, community groups, and others.

Food banks have some funds to purchase food they cannot get in donations. Occasionally, New York food banks are able to buy locally from area farms, directors said, but they are obligated to buy from the lowest-price seller, which typically means wholesale brokers.

Increasingly, U.S. food banks are the recipients of food donations with limited nutritional value, including soda, candy, cakes, and more (Farmer). Many food banks feel obligated to accept the donations, out of fear major donors, including grocery stores, will cut them off from all donations (Farmer).

The Food Bank of Central New York is one food bank that has decided to go against the trend and reject food with little or no nutritional value.

"We don't feel we need to pass on the cheapest—the white flour processed baked goods or high-fructose sweetened drinks," Ricardo said. "We aren't the food police. We aren't telling people what to eat. We are trying to do the most we can with our resources, to supply people with food they cannot afford, compared to a box of nutrient-deficient snack food."

The decrease in healthy food donations is one more reason food banks are interested in obtaining fresh produce and whole foods from farms.

7. New York State Gleaning Projects

The following projects are examples of recent and current farm gleaning projects in New York State. This is by no means a comprehensive list of all efforts but is intended to provide a snapshot of the types, size and scope of projects.

Additionally, these examples focus on agency-driven gleaning efforts. An unknown number of farmers decide to donate on their own each year. Previous studies, including those by USDA, suggest the greatest chance for sustainable gleaning efforts involve community partnerships.

- A. ***Harvest for All/Farm Bureau:*** Harvest for All is a nationwide Farm Bureau effort to encourage farmers to donate food. It has been particularly embraced by New York Farm Bureau; New Yorkers have led the nation in donations for the past three years.

Farm Bureau's role is to promote the program to its farmers members through newsletters and meetings.

"We try to help get the message out," said Patti Dugan, deputy director of member relations for New York Farm Bureau. "We encourage farmers to consider donating and working with the food banks."

American Farm Bureau also runs a contest that awards the top donation-getting state with a \$3,000 grant that goes to the food bank of the state's choice. Award winners are announced at the national annual meeting.

- B. ***Food Bank of Central New York:*** The food bank receives 300,000 pounds of from-the-farm goods, mostly produce, but also venison, beef, dairy, and more (Ricardo).

The vast majority of donated produce is apples, cabbage, onions, and potatoes, with lesser amounts of tomatoes and other items. The Food Bank of Central New York will pick up donations at the farm, especially if the quantity is a field box or more and the farm is on the food bank's delivery and procurement route.

Smaller-quantity farm or garden donations can be picked up by or delivered to local food pantries if the farmer makes arrangements.

Increasingly, the Food Bank of Central New York has sought opportunities to pay the farmers' harvesting crews; even one day of work can yield significantly more produce than volunteers do, Ricardo said, without requiring food bank staff oversight and farmer liability.

"The efficiency is about 10 times greater because that's what these pickers do. They know how," he said. "We are sensitive to the idea that farmers are not taking \$0. The farmer is donating the produce, but not the packaging, distribution, and labor."

The food bank has also received grants to reimburse farmers for packages such as onion and potato bags. This year, the food bank unveils its own fleet of three-dozen field boxes, stamped with "Food Bank of Central New York," so farmers don't have to use theirs (which the food bank returns to the farm).

Eight farms per year take advantage of the labor-reimbursement program, Ricardo said. Costs average 5 cents per pound of donated food.

Occasionally, the food bank cannot take farm donations, especially if the farm is too far away from the food bank or provides undistributable food—rotten food or too much of a certain food to distribute or store.

"We hope the growers understand who we are and what we do," Ricardo said. "Is it a fit, or not? We're a business, too. We have to be good stewards with our budget. If we have to say no to a donation, it doesn't mean we don't want produce. It means there aren't efficiencies there."

- C. ***Food Bank of the Southern Tier:*** The food bank has received donations of apples, onions, and potatoes from farmers, reported Knowles. Lesser quantities of farm donations were summer squash and green beans.

“We have attempted a couple of gleaning projects, but we don’t do a lot of it. The labor is tricky. It’s something we would like to do more of,” Knowles said.

The Food Bank of the Southern Tier reached out to farms through Cornell Cooperative Extension and visits to farmers markets.

Larger donations, such as 1,000 pounds of produce, can be picked up at the farm, especially if the farm is on the food bank’s regular procurement and delivery route. Farmers can make arrangements to bring smaller donations to the food bank or local food pantries, Knowles said.

- D. **Food Bank of Northeastern New York:** The Food Bank of Northeastern New York receives donations of apples, winter squash, potatoes and more from farmers annually, totaling 1.2 million pounds of food.

Most donations come in between June and October.

“It all depends on the season and the market,” Dwyer said.

Farmers are increasingly reluctant to allow volunteer pickers on the farm out of liability and concerns about damage to property, such as fruit trees. The food bank has become interested in projects that use farmers’ own professional harvesting crews.

A small grant from a private foundation recently allowed the food bank to reimburse farmers for the labor in harvesting produce, especially apples, for donation.

“In a situation where we can pay real pickers, not volunteers, and where we can cover farmers’ labor, we can make these efforts work. We can recover food that can be used by the food bank,” Dwyer said. “Paid professional pickers get a lot done. They know what they are doing.”

- E. **Society of St. Andrew:** Founded in 1978, the Society of St. Andrew is thought to be the largest nationwide network of farm field gleaners. The program is funded through individual, church, and corporate donations. New York’s program may be smaller than other state’s efforts.

New York gleaners, largely recruited from churches, harvest food from six farms each year, including 15 tons of winter squash and 14,000 pounds apples, according to volunteer coordinator John Conklin.

Occasionally, the group also receives donations of onions from cold storage.

The farms that donate generally are affiliated with churches that promote gleaning, Conklin said. All volunteers sign a disclaimer agreeing to hold donor farms harmless in the event of injury.

“Farmers are not sitting out there waiting to call about gleaning. They have liability concerns and if they aren’t religious, they don’t always understand the concept of gleaning,” Conklin said. “But farmers get a lot of satisfaction from donating something that may have rotted in the field.”

- F. **Chautauqua County Rural Ministry:** Since 1999, the Chautauqua County Rural Ministry has gleaned and distributed 250,000 pounds of food from farm fields. Based in Dunkirk, the group receives funding from donations, and private and government grants.

“Funding fluctuates, so the gleaning program takes on different forms,” said Josh Curry-Dastcome, project coordinator for Chautauqua County Rural Ministry. The group recruits volunteer gleaners through local churches but has used interns and people enrolled in social services workforce reentry programs.

Annual donations run approximately 8,000 pounds, Curry-Dastcome said. He said, “The size of the crop dictates the size of the donations.”

The gleaning efforts have included harvesting from the field and picking up harvested goods at the farm. Top donations include sweet corn, winter squash, potatoes, zucchini, and tomatoes.

Over the years, the group has created a database of potential farm donors, created by word-of-mouth promotion and cold-calling farmers.

Lack of funding for gleaning efforts and farmer reluctance to allow volunteers in the field are limiting factors, Curry-Dastcome said.

- G. **Cornell Cooperative Extension:** To complete this project, we reached out to county offices of Cornell Cooperative Extension to determine how many offices were involved in gleaning, and the extent of their involvement. Eighteen counties responded, 14 of which have, or recently had, some form of a gleaning project.

- i. **Cayuga:** The Master Gardener program has taken the lead in gleaning efforts in Cayuga County, including maintaining community gardens through a BOCES vocational school and a residential home for the elderly. The Master Gardeners raise the funds for seeds, soil, raised beds, and more. Food is donated to local pantries.

Additionally, the association has promoted the Venison Donation Coalition program and encouraged farmers-market vendors to donate unsold produce (Ververs).

- ii. **Dutchess:** Working with the Community Food Security Committee of Dutchess County, the Extension office participated in a farm gleaning project from 2003-2007. The Extension office recruited volunteers from its own programs, as well as Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and other programs. Gleaners gathered as much as 5,800 pounds of food per year, according to Christine Sergent, family and consumer education program leader.

Cooperative Extension played a key role in recruiting farmers they knew, said Linda Keech, executive director. CCE Dutchess also worked with farmers to provide a training session for volunteers new to farm work.

The association discontinued the gleaning effort over liability concerns about bringing volunteers onto farmland and food safety. Today, the association runs a garden that donates produce to the hungry.

- iii. **Essex:** The CCE Essex association has a promotional role in gleaning. They have successfully encouraged area farmers to donate to the Meals on Wheels program, which provides low-cost meals to the homebound (Deming).
- iv. **Jefferson:** The association has a promotional role in gleaning efforts, working with two donor farms as well as two community gardens—one at a church and the other at a low-income senior housing complex (Root).

The association's Master Gardener program also has a demonstration garden funded through a plant sale. Approximately 100 pounds of produce is donated annually (Root).

- v. **Madison:** The association has promoted gleaning, including at least one church garden that donates produce for a local food pantry. The association recently applied for grant funding for a project to encourage farmer-food pantry relations (Baase).
- vi. **Monroe:** The association has approached farmers about gleaning but found farmers were reluctant to allow volunteer pickers on the farm. Some farmers donate produce picked by their own professional crews (Nelson).
- vii. **New York:** Through its MarketMaker program, the association has provided five trainings that reached 600 faith-based organizations; education was focused on forging farmer-agency connections and teaching aid groups how to access farmers and fresh produce (Cho).
- viii. **Niagara:** The association will soon be starting a Creating Healthy Places grant-funded project that includes a gleaning component (Lovejoy Maloney).
- ix. **Orange:** Cornell Cooperative Extension of Orange County operates perhaps the largest farm-gleaning project among the New York Cooperative Extension associations. The program started in 2003, funded through the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, a grant program of the New York State Department of Health, and Vitagrant.

The association operates a refrigerated truck and recruits 400 volunteers annually for gleaning efforts (Joyce). Since 2006, the association has collected 621,977 pounds of produce and 6,188 pounds of meat (Joyce).

The association is also collaborating with Feeding America as a pilot site for a new toll-free, nationwide hotline designed to make it easier for farmers to locate local food pantry, food bank, and donation programs (Ullrich). The hotline is slated to start in fall 2011.

- x. **Rockland:** The association's Master Gardeners distribute seed packets and gardening kits funded through the Garden Writers Association's Plant a Row program. They encourage farmers and gardeners to donate produce and hold

gardening workshops. In 2010, the effort donated 3,200 pounds of produce (Cooke).

- xi. **Schuyler:*** Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County encourages farmers to donate to the area food bank. At least one apple farm donated (Chedzoy).
- xii. **St. Lawrence:*** The association hosts a demonstration high tunnel, staffed by interns from local colleges; produce is grown for Cooperative Extension outreach efforts, including 4-H camp, food preservation demonstrations, and more (Chambers). Raised beds were built by inmates at a correctional facility.
- xiii. **Ulster:*** Nutrition educators pickup produce at a local farm and distribute the food to participants in low-income nutrition education efforts, including healthy cooking techniques (Greenwald).

Additionally, the Master Gardeners promote the Plant A Row program through mailings, appearances at fairs and farmers markets, and gardening workshops.

CCE Ulster also promotes gleaning. At least one 4-H club, a community garden, and an apple farmer donate produce (Crawford).

- xiv. **Yates:*** CCE Yates encourages farmers to donate produce and promotes the Venison Donation program. At least two farmers donated produce (Landre).

8. Farmer Concerns About Gleaning

There are numerous logistical conditions to a successful farm gleaning effort. These include funding, nonprofit liability, limited time in securing and distributing perishable food, food bank knowledge of farmers and how to reach out to them, and so on. Often overlooked are the concerns of farmers themselves.

Farmer concerns included lack of knowledge about how to donate and donation requirements, including food safety protocols, packaging, etc.

- A. **Farm Liability:*** The top concern of farmers seems to be in understanding how much liability the farmer is assuming in allowing volunteer gleaners on the farm or donating food for the hungry. This is an area that requires more study, but it seems clear that farmers are assuming some liability, despite efforts by nonprofit groups, including hold harmless agreements, etc.

For example, in instances where county offices of Cornell Cooperative Extension organize volunteer gleaners on privately owned farms, liability in the event a volunteer is injured would first fall to the injured party. In the event he or she does not have adequate insurance, liability moves to the farm, then to Cooperative Extension (Fleming). Cornell Cooperative Extension requires farms to provide a certificate of insurance (Fleming).

“Farmers are at risk having volunteers on the farm,” said Kimberly Fleming, a professional development specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Each farmer's insurance policy may limit volunteers or visitors on the farm or place limitations on who can use hand tools, power equipment, work in the vicinity of animals or chemicals, and so on.

For more on food safety liability, see Section 9.

B. ***Theft and Damage to Farm Property:*** Farmers also seemed concerned about theft and damage to personal property, including volunteers trampling crops, damaging fruit trees and bushes, and more.

Food banks with experience organizing farm-gleaning efforts reported that there was a strong need to supervise volunteer gleaners, including children, as they are generally not knowledgeable about farms and typically require training in how to harvest. There were some reports that food went home with the volunteers and never made it to the food bank.

"There has been a lot of bad history with volunteer gleaners. People sometimes thought a farmer had free produce every year," Ricardo said.

Melissa Knowles, food-sourcing manager for the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, recalled a gleaning project at an apple farm where the food bank was not invited back due to the number of unsupervised children who came with the volunteers.

"They didn't want children stomping all over the place," she said.

C. ***Cost to Farm:*** Additionally, farmers seem concerned about the loss of their own time and money (often on top of the lost revenue in the donated crop) implicit in many gleaning efforts. Farmers and their paid staff may feel compelled to be on site or assist in gleaning efforts, drawing their time away from others endeavors.

Almost all of the food bank and nonprofit organizations interviewed in this study reported that they promoted gleaning to farmers in part through the use of federal tax incentives: that is, farmers that donate may be eligible for tax breaks based on the value of their food donations.

In fact, such tax incentives for farmers seem to be exaggerated.

"Generally, a contribution is limited to the income tax basis of the property being donated. So those that raise ... food would have no deduction for the contribution because the expenses of raising the food have been included on the tax return," said Joseph Bennett, a CPA, and tax specialist with the Cornell University Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management.

In other words, because the expenses of farming are already tax deductible to the farm business, deducting a donation might be viewed as "double-dipping" to the Internal Revenue Service.

Over the years, the government has passed enhancement taxes that allow farmers to deduct farm-raised food as both a business expense and charitable contribution. Most recently, an enhancement tax for food donations was passed following the destruction of

Hurricane Katrina in 2005 but was not renewed in subsequent years (Bennett). That legislation allowed for deductions of property basis plus 50 percent.

Farmers that did not deduct the expenses of raising the crop but wished to deduct for charitable contributions would be limited to deductions only when the contributed value exceeds 20 percent, but not more than 50 percent, of adjusted gross income—meaning farmers that contribute smaller amount of food generally are not eligible for charitable tax deductions, according to IRS Publication 526.

D. ***Efficiency:*** Because much of farm donated goods are highly perishable, there is generally a short window in which gleaning or other donation efforts need to be accomplished. Additionally, as farmers or farm workers may be pulled away from other tasks to assist in gleaning efforts, there is pressure to glean efficiently.

Unfortunately, volunteer gleaners are generally not efficient workers. They may have limited or no experience being on a farm and do not know how to harvest. Volunteers may require training by the farmer.

Some with experience in farm gleaning projects reported that the volunteers may be uncomfortable working in farm conditions, especially heat and rain. Others said volunteers are always motivated workers.

“They are out there to help and feel good. They aren’t necessarily motivated to work hard,” Dwyer said.

Farmers and food bank directors that were interviewed reported they are interested in farm gleaning efforts that use paid workers, especially the farm’s own crew, rather than volunteers.

9. **Good Samaritan Law**

The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act, passed in 1996, is federal law that “promotes food recovery by limiting the liability of donors to instances of gross negligence or intentional misconduct” (Waste 21).

The law seems to protect donors from unintentional liability related to food safety, including the “nature, age, packaging, or condition of apparently wholesome food” (Waste 21).

The law has been understood to protect farmers from general liability, although it’s unclear how the law interacts with insurance policies. Additional research on the subject is required.

“The Act also protects farmers who allow gleaners on their land” (Waste 21). However, the law cannot stop anyone who is injured from suing a farmer: “Anyone can file a lawsuit against anyone else. The ‘Good Samaritan’ laws just set some guidance for who would win such a lawsuit” (Citizen’s).

10. **AmeriCorps Gleaners**

Although New York does not have direct experience using AmeriCorps workers as farm gleaners, an AmeriCorps initiative from several years ago may offer a template.

AmeriCorps is a national, federally supported program that provides funding to nonprofit agencies to hire workers to provide “national service to address critical community needs in education, public safety, health and the environment.” Workers receive an education stipend and or living allowance, health care benefits, and child care assistance. Sometimes billed as the “domestic Peace Corps,” AmeriCorps was founded in 1993 under President Bill Clinton.

Each year, AmeriCorps offers employment to 75,000 people, according to its website.

In 1996, the United States Department of Agriculture initiated the “Summer of Gleaning,” in which AmeriCorps workers at 22 sites in 20 states organized farm gleaning efforts. The programs were administered by USDA Rural Development, Farm Service Agency, and Cooperative Extension associations.

The programs worked on an aggregator model in which 88 AmeriCorps workers recruited 1,600 non-compensated volunteers (USDA). The bulk of the gleaning occurred on farms, but some donations efforts took place at restaurants, bakeries, etc.

USDA reported that the 22 gleaning programs established in 1996 were still taking place in 1999 without AmeriCorps assistance.

AmeriCorps workers in New York have collected food for donation at grocery stores and participated in farm-to-school projects, said Jack Salo, director of the Rural Health Network of South Central New York. Salo has supervised AmeriCorps workers for more than a decade.

AmeriCorps provides general liability insurance, but the host site for the project work would be the first insurer, Salo said.

“There would always be an intermediary between the farmer and the AmeriCorps workers,” Salo said.

AmeriCorps does provide workers compensation for its workers, which many volunteers would not have. Paid workers may be more committed to the project.

11. Requirements to donate

Often, food banks can pickup donations at the farm, especially if the quantity is field-box size or larger and the farm is near a regular food bank delivery and procurement route.

Smaller-quantity, farm or garden-size, donations can be picked up by or delivered to local food pantries if the farmer makes arrangements.

None of the food banks interviewed for this study required Good Agricultural Practices certification. Good Agricultural Practices, or GAPS, are standard for how fresh produce is handled at the farm level. In recent years, grocery stores, wholesale brokers, food processors, and other large scale buyers have required GAPS compliance from farms.

Likewise, none of the food banks interviewed for this study placed restrictions on farm production practices, such as fertilizer or pesticide use.

Food bank directors seemed contented that food originally intended for sale was fit for consumption.

Some food banks prefer food donations to come packaged, sized and weighted; check with local organizations for their requirements.

Food banks do not want rotten food, but may accept a large donation, such as a trailer load, if the farmer discloses that a small percentage of the donation, say 10 percent, was spoiled. Food banks need to be able to determine if the value of the donation outweighs the cost of sorting through damaged goods (Ricardo).

Food banks are required to meet all health standards and laws related to the distribution and storage of food, such as the refrigeration or freezing of meat, dairy, and eggs.

12. Venison for Donation

An established gleaning program in New York State that may offer a template for other projects is the Venison Donation Coalition. A nonprofit coalition of hunters, farmers, state environmental conservationists, federal natural resource conservation specialists, and food banks coordinates the donation of legally hunted venison meat to food pantries and the needy around the state.

Hunters donate the meat. Meat processors are reimbursed for their costs in animal slaughter and packaging. Food banks pickup the packaged meat along their trucking route of taking food from regional warehouses to the thousands of smaller food pantries around New York.

Since forming in 1999, the Venison Donation Coalition has facilitated the donation of 337.5 tons of meat to New York food banks, according to its website.

“Venison is a nutritional red meat. It’s low in fat, and people said, ‘why aren’t we doing more with it?’” recalled Richard Winnett, a recently retired coordinator with the Finger Lakes Resource Conservation and Development Council. “The RC&D councils were the catalyst that got the program going. The food banks wanted to see the program.”

RC&D councils are nonprofit entities established by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, which provided a federal conservationist to serve as coordinator, as well as funding for administrative costs. New York has eight regional councils that worked on agricultural and rural conservation and economic development projects.

The RC&D councils helped promote the venison donation program and played a critical administrative role in bookkeeping and administering program funds, especially through the Federation of New York State RC&D Councils, and the Finger Lakes RC&D and Central New York RC&D councils.

In the summer of 2011, federal funding to the RC&D program was eliminated nationwide. Each council maintains separate nonprofit status and is currently grappling with next steps, including seeking alternative funding, combining with another organization, or dissolving.

Winnett said the Venison Donation Coalition program has funds to continue for several more years.

To participate in the Venison Donation Coalition program, hunters call the toll-free phone number, 1-866-862-3347. Hunters must check in with the Coalition before taking a carcass to a

processor and must deliver the animal to a processing facility that has been approved by the Coalition.

Donated venison must be properly field dressed and processed at a state-licensed deer processing facility; all donations must be packaged and labeled with the following information: a statement of "not for sale," the type of meat (venison), the license number of the hunter, the carcass number of the deer, the name and address of the processor, and date of processing.

To keep processing costs low, deer are generally processed entirely into ground or stew meat in 1-2 pound packages. Occasionally 5-10 pound packages of meat may be assembled for soup kitchens and other volume users.

The Venison Donation Coalition does not offer statistics on the number of deer donated by sportsmen versus farm owners. However, it is clear that the Venison Donation program has targeted the farm community for donations, especially through relationships with agricultural service organizations that provide promotion, including state and county Farm Bureau, Cornell Cooperative Extension, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, and others.

Farmers are strategic partners as they tend to own large tracts of rural land where deer live. Additionally, farmers may obtain nuisance hunting permits which allow for killing animals that threaten crops.

The majority of donated venison comes into food banks in autumn, which suggests most of the deer are caught during the regular hunting season. Some venison is donated during the summer, which suggests those animals are caught with nuisance permits, Winnett said.

An additional logistical hurdle to donating deer outside of the standard hunting season is that many custom meat processors operate their businesses seasonally or may process deer in the fall and switch to livestock during other times of the year.

Running the Venison Donation program requires approximately \$125,000 per year, Winnett estimated. The Coalition reported that it spent \$105,000 on processing in 2008 alone.

From 2003-2008, the venison donation project was supported by a \$500,000 grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The grant funds paid for meat processing and packaging costs, and some program promotion. The grant was contingent upon a match of time from Resource Conservation and Development coordinators.

In 2009, New York started the DECALS program, in which hunters were encouraged to donate \$1 to the donation program at the time they paid for a hunting license. The DECALS effort has not proved as fruitful as expected.

Winnett reported the DECALS program brought in \$25,000 in its first year, when 500,000 licenses were purchased. To keep the Venison Donation Coalition going, cash donations came in from hunting clubs, county Farm Bureaus, and other organizations. In some cases, food banks also paid for venison processing.

Starting in fall 2011 the Food Bank Association of New York will continue the venison donation effort, aided by a five-year, \$500,000 grant from the New York State Department of Health.

There are venison and game donation programs similar to New York's in other states. In Maryland, all hunting license fees include a mandatory fee that helps support the venison donation program.

Maryland licensing fees are expected to generate \$100,000 annually toward processing costs, according to the Fairfield County (Connecticut) Deer Management Alliance.

13. Beef and Meat From Livestock

In recent years, there have been small-scale, localized efforts to donate beef and livestock meat from farms to food banks and pantries in New York.

In interviews conducted for this project, both the Food Bank of Central New York and the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York reported receiving beef from farmers in the past few years.

Joan Smith, a dairy farmer from New Hartford, NY, started a beef-gleaning project in 2010 in Oneida County. From fall 2010 to fall 2011, six dairy farms each donated a cow to the project. Smith's goal was to donate one cow per month to the effort, but the project has been hampered as the market price for beef has risen.

"I would like this project to get bigger and better, but when meat prices went sky-high, we couldn't really push farmers," Smith said.

She was inspired to start the effort by a farmer friend in Indiana who participates in a project where beef and hog farmers donate meat to food banks; that effort is funded through farmer, agri-business and church donations.

In Smith's project, farmers were reimbursed by the Food Bank of Central New York for the cost of trucking live cattle from the farm to slaughterhouse and for the cost of slaughter and meat packaging. The Food Bank of Central New York picked up packaged, frozen meat at the slaughterhouse and distributed it to food pantries and emergency food providers throughout the Central New York region.

Logistical hurdles to getting the effort off the ground included that to be legally compliant, all donated meat had to be killed and slaughtered at a USDA-certified facility. Smith struggled to find slaughterhouses willing or able to participate in the project, with some slaughterhouses reporting that they scheduled kills eight months in advance. The project has located two facilities that will process the beef for pickup by the food bank.

A lesser hurdle, Smith reported, was that some farmers were interested in donating only if they were assured the meat would go to feed the needy within their own town or county. In fact, such a stipulation is generally unattainable. Food pantries in smaller towns and counties often do not have the freezer space or scope of program to distribute 600-800 pounds of beef.

Working with a regional-scope food bank with the ability to distribute food among hundreds of outlets made the effort doable, Smith said.

Donated beef occasionally comes from injured animals, such as a cow with a broken leg, where the meat is food-safe. Other donations come from farms with surplus animals.

The farm donation effort is promoted to farmers through the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County news bulletin, Farm Flash, and through word-of-mouth among farmers, Smith said.

14. Cornell Cooperative Extension Role

Cornell Cooperative Extension associations seem ideally suited for participation in gleaning projects. Assets include the organization's nonprofit status, education mission, and cross-disciplinary approach in agriculture, gardening, nutrition, home economics, and family care.

Although some county associations have approached gleaning as organizers of field gleaning efforts, liability may preclude these efforts. In most cases, Cooperative Extension's insurance requires farmers to provide certificates of insurance (Fleming), and some farmers have expressed reluctance to assume additional liability.

Additionally, Cooperative Extension's insurance covers enrolled volunteers, but gleaning efforts may require recruiting volunteers outside the Extension program. Another consideration is that Extension's insurance requires that vulnerable populations, including children, elderly, and the disabled who participate in Extension programs are supervised by staff or enrolled volunteers (Fleming).

Cornell Cooperative Extension associations have already branched out into other roles in gleaning efforts, including promotion of others' gleaning programs; agriculture, gardening and nutrition education, and more.

An additional promotional role for Cornell Cooperative Extension associations could be serving as a matchmaker between farmers and food banks. Yet another role could be serving in an advisory capacity in gleaning programs, grant-seeking efforts, and similar situations.

Some of the roles ideally suited for Cornell Cooperative Extension associations would be well-augmented by collaborations with other agricultural service groups including the New York State Department of Agricultural and Markets, Farm Service Agency, Resource Conservation and Development Councils, and nonprofit groups.

15. Funding for Gleaning Efforts

Gleaning projects in recent years in New York State have allowed food banks, food pantries, and nonprofit groups to provide or extend from-the-farm donation activities, including supervised volunteer pickers, paid harvesters, packaging of farm goods, pick up at the farm, meat processing, delivery to the food bank, and more.

These projects have largely been temporary and regional or local. Although most organizations seemed reluctant to share solid numbers, project funding seemed to range from several hundred dollars to less than \$10,000 for 1-3 year efforts. At least one effort was funded by a regional Community Foundation.

Other efforts are focused on buying gardening equipment, seed, and plant inputs for community gardens whose bounty will be donated to the hungry. One example is the Garden Writers Association and its Plant a Row for the Hungry program, which provides vegetable seeds and other items to groups that grow food for the hungry.

The Plant a Row for the Hungry program has donated 14 million pounds of seeds to gardening-donation efforts since 1995, according to its website.

Additionally, some efforts were funded through fundraising efforts such as Master Gardener plant sales, or through donations from individuals, churches, business, and altruistic-minded organizations. One county Cooperative Extension said they received gift cards from local big box stores to purchase gardening supplies.

16. Potential Funders

A farm gleaning project funded through grant sources could take on a variety of appearances, depending on the partners involved, size and scope of goals, funds allocated, and more.

There may be some support, whether government or private, for aspects of gleaning or farm-food-donation efforts, especially where public education, health, and hunger-alleviation needs are met; all these goals make the Cooperative Extension system an ideal partner, perhaps especially where Cooperative Extension may use its cross-disciplinary approach in the areas of agriculture, gardening, nutrition, human health, community development, and more.

Potential funding programs at the federal level for a gleaning project could include USDA Community Food Projects; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy Food Financing Initiative; AmeriCorps, and others.

State funders could include the NYS Department of Health.

Private foundations, such as the Kellogg Foundation, may be ideally suited to a gleaning effort.

In addition to hunger-relief programs, funding streams may include those that address food deserts, workforce development funding, community gardening, and more.

Due to the philosophical reluctance of most grant funders, public and private, to pay for costs they perceive as belonging in the private sector, it may be difficult to locate funders willing to pay (or reimburse) for the labor of harvesters on privately held farms. Many requests for proposals and grant applications are written in a manner that would not consider such a funding request, even if the labor was employed solely for the purpose of collecting food for donation to the needy, i.e., a public good.

Even in the event that grant funds to cover farm labor were located, such funding would likely be short-term. To ensure long-term project success and sustainability, gleaning and farm-food-donation projects will likely need to partner with organizations that can provide coordination, oversight, and advocacy as well as fundraising. Some or all of these functions might be performed by food banks, and community and religious groups. Because of this restriction, projects may remain localized or regionalized.

17. Potential Incentives

Alternatively, opportunities to expand or initiate gleaning projects may not come not from grant funding or grant funding alone, but from legislative change. More study is needed, but such changes could include:

- Farm Bill amendments, such as payments, loan forgiveness, etc. in exchange for charitable contributions
- Reinstatement of the federal enhancement tax that enables farmers to make charitable tax deductions for donations
- Additional research into unanswered questions, such as the strengths and weaknesses of the Good Samaritan law; an assessment of how much food is left unharvested in the field; etc.
- Legislation that directs a portion of hunting fees to pay for game donation programs
- Legislation that allows livestock meat for donation to be processed at custom butcher shops, similar to the venison requirements
- And others

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