



GLEANNING HANDBOOK

LOREM IPSUM

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.





CONTENTS

- X Lorem ipsum

BENEFICIARIES

Good food needs a good home – that’s why one of the most important jobs of any gleaning project is to find, and develop relationships with, organisations who will be able to receive and use the fruit and vegetables that you glean. We often refer to these as beneficiaries.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF BENEFICIARIES

With regard to gleaning, beneficiaries generally fall into three main categories. Finding or choosing the right beneficiaries to work with will depend upon a number of factors – we give more information on this further below.

- **Re-distribution charities**

These are organisations that have the infrastructure needed to collect and sometimes store large quantities of food, and redistribute portions of that food to multiple smaller charities.

This usually ensures that the food is moved and used quickly, which is often very important when working with fresh produce. A good example of a re-distribution charity is [FareShare](#) in the UK.

- **Organisations who provide food or meals directly to people**

This category divides into:

- Organisations that prepare meals for people e.g. homeless shelters or soup kitchens
- Organisations that distribute food goods directly to people to take and use at home such as food banks

It’s important to note that these organisations will only be able to receive a relatively small amount of produce compared with re-distribution charities. Bear this in mind if you are considering delivering to them directly.

- **Social enterprises**

There are an increasing number of social entrepreneurs working on innovative projects that help tackle food surplus, for example by creating products such as juices, smoothies, jams and soups. Many of these social entrepreneurs are members of the [FSE Network](#) (see box), so that may be a good place to find them.

And there is nothing to stop a gleaning project from setting up their own social enterprise to directly transform the gleaned produce. Our resident gleaning experts in Catalonia, Espigoladors, have done exactly that by creating their own brand, [Es-Imperfect](#). Another type of business that falls into this category are social supermarkets, such as [Community Shop](#) in the UK.

FOOD BANKS

The term food bank is used in many European countries. However, be aware that food banks in one country may operate quite differently from food banks in another country! Sometimes there are several organisations within the same country who run food banks, and each organisation will have different ways of working. Some of the most important things to be aware of are:

Fresh food. Food banks in some countries (for example, the UK) cannot receive or distribute fresh food like fruit and vegetables. They will only handle long-life products like dry or tinned goods. In other countries, food banks are very happy to receive fresh food.

Who they provide food to. Many food banks specialise in providing food directly to people. However, in some countries, such as Belgium, the food banks redistribute food to other charities. If this is the case, they may be able to take larger quantities of produce.

CHARITIES VS SOCIAL ENTERPRISES: WHO SHOULD I WORK WITH?

FOOD SURPLUS ENTREPRENEURS NETWORK

The Food Surplus Entrepreneurs Network ([FSE Network](#)) is the European community connecting food surplus entrepreneurs. Their goal is to have a world without food waste.

The FSE Network supports food surplus entrepreneurs in four ways:

- It connects them internationally in a virtual, pan-European platform which connects 180+ social innovators.
- It organises international events to bring together social innovators from across Europe, like the [Food Waste Collab](#).
- It connects them on a city or regional level in FSE Hubs where social innovators meet regularly to build solutions to their challenges or to inspire new entrepreneurs.
- It showcases the movement of food surplus entrepreneurs on its [online map](#) and social media.



There is no right or wrong answer to this question. Charities and social enterprises both have a very important role to play in preventing food waste and redistributing good food. Here are some things to consider:

Immediate need

Many charities work with people who are in real need of healthy food; these same charities often struggle to find fresh, nutritious fruit and vegetables. For this reason, many gleaning projects like to work with charities wherever possible.

Large-scale gleans and short-life produce

In some cases, particularly when you glean relatively large quantities of food, the charities in your network may not have capacity to receive it all. There are also times when the fruit or vegetables you glean need to be 'used' very quickly.

Increasingly, social enterprises are providing solutions to these problems, for example, Kromkommer in the Netherlands can transform moderate quantities of vegetables into batches of soup, which means the vegetables are given a new lease of life.

Financial contributions for gleaned produce

When you do work with social enterprises, they can often make a financial contribution for the gleaned produce they receive whereas most charities cannot afford to do this. Any money you receive could be passed directly to the farmer, or be absorbed by the gleaning project to help cover your costs. A third option is to share the money between both parties.

Some additional ideas:

- **Events**

As the anti-food waste revolution spreads across Europe and the rest of the world, you may find that there is an event happening near you that would put gleaned produce to excellent use! Two fine examples are [Disco Soup] and [Feeding the 5000]. And if there isn't an event already happening near you... why not start your own?

- **Connectors**

Many countries now have one or more virtual platforms to match donors (organisations that have food surplus) to beneficiaries (organisations that can use it). Two interesting examples are [Plan Zeroes](#) in the UK and [foodwe](#) in Belgium.

- **Public sector institutions**

Schools, hospitals and prisons are all potential beneficiaries for donations of gleaned produce. However, be aware that in many countries these institutions often have contracts with companies who supply their food and/or meals. This may prevent them from accepting food from other sources.

HOW TO FIND BENEFICIARIES

There is no set process for finding beneficiaries, it will largely come down to local knowledge or research. The good news is, organisations who want to use fresh, nutritious food are not usually hard to find! Most will at the very least have a website, so an internet search is a good starting point. Many will also be active on social media.

Another good approach is to attend relevant events like a talk on food sustainability, a fundraising event for a food charity or a Disco Soup. You'll probably meet many people there who know of or work for organisations who are interested in receiving food.

Don't underestimate the power of networks. Once you find one food charity, you'll quickly find others whether that's through social media or word of mouth.

Finally, if you put just a little time and effort into promoting your project, you may find that organisations come to you. Create a website, get Tweeting, talk of people and get the local media interested in what you're doing.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

When you are looking for organisations who might make good beneficiaries for gleaned produce, here are some points to consider:

- **Can they handle fresh food?**

Be aware that some organisations will not take fresh produce. For example UK food banks only handle dried goods or tinned food.

- **Can they handle large quantities of fresh food?**

Many organisations do use fresh food, but only in relatively small quantities. For this reason, it's often impractical for Gleaning Networks to deliver food directly to these charities. Instead, it is much more practical to partner with an organisation who can redistribute the food.

- **Do they have cool storage?**

Since fruit and vegetables are perishable, it's often important to have a cool storage area to keep the produce fresh before it is used or redistributed. For some produce, such as potatoes, this isn't as much of a problem but for strawberries and lettuce it is essential.

- **Can they help with collecting produce?**

Some organisations have their own vehicles and drivers and are often happy to come to the farm and collect gleaned produce. Other charities may be able to loan you a vehicle but cannot provide a driver. In these cases you will need to check arrangements with the vehicle insurance.

- **Can they provide support or assistance in other ways?**

Other ways that beneficiaries can sometimes help with gleaning are:

- Helping to find volunteers for the gleaning day
- Providing equipment such as food crates
- Making a financial contribution for any gleaned produce they receive

- **Transport arrangements should be simple and cost-effective**

Ideally, you will only need to arrange delivery of the gleaned produce to one location. Trying to deliver to several locations adds time, complexity and cost.

- **Opening days and times**

Will the beneficiary be open to receive the produce on the day you are gleaning? Bear in mind that many organisations are closed on weekends, which is often when gleaning days take place.



See our [Transport, Logistics and Equipment] section for further considerations. NOTE: When working with beneficiaries, try to ensure that your donations of gleaned produce will not be disrupting donations from other organisations. Competition and ill-will with other donors should be avoided.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the heart of gleaning – they are the people who will devote their time and energy to saving this food, who will share your aims and values. Building up a good base of volunteers is one of the first priorities for any gleaning project.

FINDING AND RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Getting started – how to find volunteers

A good way to find volunteers is to make contact with other local groups, organisations or projects. Many will be happy to promote your gleaning project or share details with their members. Start by looking for groups who are interested in one or more of the following topics: *food, food waste, farming, environmental issues, local community or social justice.*

What makes a good gleaning volunteer?

There's no such thing as a typical gleaner! Gleaning is a fun and inclusive activity that's suitable for most people. However, you should bear in mind the following:

- **Children and young people**

On many occasions children are welcome on gleaning days, but this is always something you should check in advance with the farmer. There may be one or more reasons why it's not possible to include children on the day, for example, because of the farm's health and safety regulations. This is especially the case if the gleaning involves the use of equipment such as harvesting knives. See more about health and safety below. [link needed]

- **Fitness**

While gleaning is fun, it can also be demanding physical work. Gleaners often come away from a day in the fields feeling happily tired. Some gleaning organisations deliberately limit their gleaning days to half a day (maximum four hours), to ensure they are not demanding too much energy from their volunteers! It's also important to consider the weather. People tire much more quickly if they're working in the sun, and don't want to work too long if it's very cold or wet.

Availability

Gleaning days can happen during the week or on a weekend, depending on when the farmer is able to 'host' the gleaners. So it's ideal to have a good mix of volunteers – some who are available to glean on

ESPIGOLADORS

Mireia Barba of Espigoladors on their experience of working with volunteers

In Espigoladors we have volunteers of all ages. Many of our gleaners are people who are out of work, or in a vulnerable situation. We glean during the week but also on weekends – to include people who work during the week, or who want to involve their whole family.

If people are interested in gleaning, we like to direct them to our website. We have also used social networks to publicize the project, and sometimes specific websites where volunteers can be found and recruited.

An average of 4-10 people will glean during 3-6 hours depending on the quantity of produce, and how easy/hard it is to glean. Espigoladors brings breakfast for everyone, and often we can eat some of the fruits that we glean. Sometimes the gleaners can also take away a box of produce.

Our gleaners have a positive experience; many choose to come back and volunteer with us again. It's a chance for them to get away from everyday life, to dignify their situation and to spend a day doing an activity that brings so much value.

weekends, and some who can glean during the week. This will allow you to be flexible, and give you the best chance of fitting into the farmer's schedule. Universities and colleges are good places to find 'midweek gleaners', as students often have more flexible schedules than people in full-time work.

Proximity to the farm

It's a common challenge of gleaning: volunteers are often based in towns and cities, whereas farms are in the countryside. So there will always be a need to travel to gleaning days, but where possible try to minimise the travel distance – it will save time and money. Make the effort to build up a network of volunteers in each region where you plan to glean. And if you have more volunteers than you need for a particular gleaning day (see below) prioritise the volunteers who live closest to the farm.

Driving

Volunteers who are able to drive are particularly useful. Volunteers who have their own car, are willing to drive to the farm, and can offer lift-shares to other gleaners... these people are gleaning heroes.

NB: for more information about travel arrangements for volunteers, see Section 8: How to coordinate a gleaning day [link needed]

HOW MANY VOLUNTEERS DO I NEED?

Farmers can usually give a good estimate of how much produce is available to glean, and will often communicate this in terms of weight e.g. 750kgs of cauliflower. That estimate is the starting point for you to determine how many gleaning volunteers you need. You should also consider:

- **How many hours you will spend gleaning**

Work out what time you plan to arrive the farm, and when you will leave. Remember to allow time for breaks. If spending more than half a day, we recommend at least 30 minutes for lunch.

- **The type of fruit or vegetable you are gleaning**

The main things you need to know are:

- Weight (mass)

There is a big difference between 750kg of cauliflowers and 750kg of cherries! 750kg is equal to a few hundred cauliflowers, but several thousand cherries. It would take considerably longer to glean the 750kg of cherries.

- The method for gleaning (harvesting) the crop

Some crops are quicker or easier to harvest than others. Apples are easy to pull from the tree and are often at a very convenient height. Cauliflowers and brassica need to be cut from the ground, but are planted close together and not difficult to reach. For cherries you usually need to climb a ladder, pick the cherries, come back down and move the ladders and start again.

- **Loading produce onto the vehicle**

It's ideal if the vehicle that is transporting the produce can be parked in (or very close to) the field where you are gleaning, so that you can load it quickly with your filled crates. If this is not possible, your gleaners may need to repeatedly walk a moderate distance, carrying crates to and from the vehicle – this will add time to your day. Sometimes the farmer will offer to help, for example by letting you stack crates onto a pallet, then moving the pallets with their tractor or forklift.

SOME EXAMPLES OF GLEANING TIMES

Here are some examples from the UK.

It took 20 people 6 hours to glean 2 tons of apples. The apples were hand-picked, and the apples were quite sparse (often 1-3 per tree) and often hidden.

It took 8 people 6 hours to glean 1 ton of parsnips. The farmer had lifted the parsnips out of the ground, and volunteers had to sort out edible produce from inedible produce.

It took 15 people 6 hours to glean 3 tons of cauliflowers. Each cauliflower needed to be cut with a harvesting knife, and often the outer leaves had to be removed. But the cauliflowers were also large and spaced close together in the field.

- **The efficiency of your gleaning team**

It's always good to have a plan. Consider the layout of the field, and try to determine the most effective use of your volunteers. For example, in an apple orchard you could assign one volunteer to glean each row of trees. You can always ask the farmer for advice – after all, they know the field better than anyone, and they're usually very happy to help.

- **It's better to over estimate**

With time and practice, you will get very good at calculating how many volunteers you need for a particular gleaning day. When you first begin, or whenever you're unsure, it's probably better to (slightly) over-estimate the numbers. If you end up with too many volunteers, your gleaning day will simply end sooner than expected. But if you don't have enough people, you may end up working really hard all day and still leaving some un-gleaned produce in the fields.



A gleaning train in motion

- **The joy of teamwork**

Everything is better with teamwork. We're particularly fond of gleaning trays, which are especially efficient at moving lots of crates, quickly.

KEEPING PEOPLE SAFE

Generally speaking, gleaning is not a dangerous activity – but on farms you must *always* be careful. In Section 7 of this guide you'll find lots of information about health and safety. The most important things to remember are:

- **Always ask the farmer about specific health and safety requirements on their farm. Ensure that every volunteer is aware of these requirements.**
- **For every gleaning day, ensure that you have at least one person (you or a volunteer) who is trained in first aid.**
- **If you are using equipment, such as knives or ladders, ensure that you everybody knows how to use and handle these safely.**

AND FINALLY... ENJOY THE DAY

There are many reasons why people give up their time to come gleaning. Some are passionate about helping to redistribute good food to disadvantaged people. Some feel very strongly about the environmental issues connected with food waste. For others it's a chance to get away from the city and reconnect with the countryside, or learn more about how our food is grown.

As important as any of those reasons are, remember also that gleaning is fun. It's a day out, often in beautiful countryside; an opportunity to work with your hands; and a chance to meet new, interesting and like-minded people.

Make time for everyone to have lunch together. Contact your volunteers in advance and encourage them to bring food to share. And don't forget to include any gleaned fruits – nothing tastes as good as an apple straight from the tree.

EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS

In this section we provide an overview of some of the equipment and tools that you might need for gleaning. Whenever you speak with a farmer to arrange a gleaning day, it's a good idea to ask their advice about what equipment you will need. You may also find that the farmer is happy to let you use their equipment.

ESSENTIAL: FIRST AID KIT

We strongly recommend taking a first aid kit to all gleaning days. Most first aid kits will be suitable for a maximum number of people – for example, a standard UK first aid kit is 20 person. If you are planning a gleaning day that involves more than 20 volunteers, you should consider buying a larger first-aid kit, or taking two (or more) standard size kits.

GLEANING TOOLS

Knives

Certain types of vegetable are usually harvested using knives. Good examples are broccoli, cabbages, cauliflower, leek, spring green, sprouts and some salads e.g. lettuce. Harvesting knives come in many shapes and sizes. Some have teeth ('serrated' blades) designed to saw through thick stems, while others are like machetes and are intended to chop or slice. The machete-style knives are also useful for vegetables that have outer leaves and foliage that may need to be removed during harvesting – for example, cauliflowers.



Straight-edged harvesting knife



Curved, serrated-edged harvesting knife

Gloves

If you are using harvesting knives, you must also use cut-resistant gloves to ensure against any accidents. Make sure you have one pair of gloves for all volunteers who will be using knives.



Cut-resistant gloves

Fruit-picking baskets

Though these are not essential, they can considerably increase your gleaning speed and efficiency. They are worn across the shoulder and sit at waist-level, so are easy to fill on the move with the fruit that you pick. Once the baskets are full, they can be quickly emptied into nearby crates. Farmers who grow apples, pears, plums and other orchard fruit will often have fruit baskets that they can lend to you.

Scales

Hang-scales (or hanging scales) are useful for calculating the quantity of produce – in terms of weight – that you glean. By weighing a small sample of your produce, you can find an average weight and use this to calculate the total. For example, if you are gleaning into plastic crates, choose three crates and weigh the contents of each one to find an average weight; then multiply this by the total number of crates to find the total weight gleaned.

Be aware that you will usually have to decant the produce from the crate into a bag with a handle, so that you can hang the produce on the weighing hook properly. Bring a strong bag for this purpose!



Fruit-picking basket



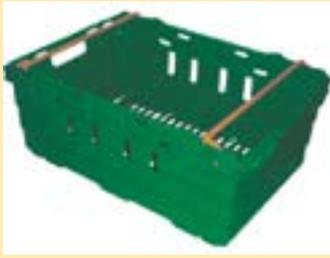
Hanging Scale

Ladders

The farmer will usually tell you in advance if ladders are required to reach and pick the fruit. This is not often the case, but sometimes applies to orchard fruit such as apples, pears or cherries. If the farmer cannot lend you ladders for the day, consider whether you have budget to buy them and how you'd be able to transport them to the farm! The cost and inconvenience is usually prohibitive, but may be worth it in some instances, especially if you will need to use the ladders on several gleaning days.

Packing materials

The produce that you glean will need to be packed appropriately so that it can be handled, transported and sometimes stored. For many types of fruit and vegetable, the most useful packing item is a stackable plastic food crate. Netted bags are useful for robust vegetables such as potatoes and carrots, while soft fruit (e.g. strawberries or raspberries) may need to be packed first into small punnets to protect it from being crushed or bruised. Depending on the transport you are using, you may also need to consider using pallets.



STACKABLE PLASTIC FOOD CRATE

Advantages: durable, weather-proof, stackable

Disadvantages: relatively expensive compared to other packing materials.



NET BAGS OR SACKS

Advantages: strong, relatively cheap and each net bag can hold quite a lot of produce.

Disadvantages: not generally suitable for anything other than root vegetables – fruits and more delicate vegetables could easily damage when sacks are stacked on top of each other.



CARDBOARD FRUIT TRAYS

Advantages: local manufacturers may have surplus cardboard trays that they can donate.

Disadvantages: not suitable for use in wet weather, and generally not very strong – usually capable of holding less weight.



LARGE FRUIT BINS (WOOD OR PLASTIC)

Advantages: can hold a large amount of produce and have a pallet built into the base for easy transport.

Disadvantages: expensive to buy, but farmers are sometimes willing to donate old bins they no longer use. Like net bags, may also be unsuitable for more delicate produce.



PALLETS

Pallets can be useful (to stack filled crates onto) when you are gleaning and transporting larger quantities of produce – because they can be picked up and moved by forklift vehicles. Be aware also that some transport companies will only move goods that are loaded onto pallets.



PALLET SHRINK-WRAP AND APPLICATOR TOOL

Wrapping pallets with strong shrink-wrap plastic helps to stabilise the goods during transport. It is not always essential, but some transport companies recommend or require this.

FARMERS AND GROWERS

Being forced to throw away large quantities of nutritious, delicious food, because the supermarkets decide it is the 'wrong' size, colour or shape, affects farmers greatly and can turn a low-margin business into one that makes a loss, year after year.

Cosmetic standards, especially when combined with other unfair trading practices, can even drive a farmer out of business. Despite these enormous pressures, many farmers choose to work with gleaning projects to donate their un-saleable produce to those who need it most. Farmers are also coming to understand that it is campaigns such as gleaning that can champion their cause, by highlighting and fighting against the causes of food waste.

BEFORE YOU START

Before you begin contacting farmers, carry out some initial research to build a picture of horticulture in your region. What type of crops are being grown – and when are they usually in harvest? Is farming in your region dominated by one or two large agribusinesses, or are there many small independent farmers? Finally, ensure that you have a basic understanding of food waste on farms: understanding the issues that farmers face will help you ask better probing questions, and to build a rapport with them. See section 1 for more information on farm-level food waste.

If there are many farmers and/or many different crop-types in your region, you may wish to prioritise who you contact based on:

- **Seasonality.**
It's most useful to contact farmers close to the time when they will be harvesting their crop – at this point they will have a good idea how much waste they are likely to have.
- **Size of farm.**
Generally speaking, larger farms have larger quantities of waste. Even if they waste a lower percentage of their crop (compared to smaller farms), the overall volume of waste may be higher.
- **Crop type and associated levels of waste.**
Some types of crop typically have higher levels of waste than others. This may vary by country.

FINDING FARMERS AND GROWERS

Internet search and online directories

Larger farms and agribusinesses may either have their own website, or be listed in an online directory.

Farmers/Growers Associations

Farmers sometimes belong to certain groups or associations. For example, The British Leek Growers Association has around 12 members: some of these farmers will grow only leeks, others will grow a variety of crops including leeks.

Social media

While farmers are not generally recognized as pioneers of modern communications technology, you may be surprised to learn that many are very active on social media. Certainly in the UK, Twitter has become very popular with farmers. Topics include supply and demand, weather, new technologies and requesting or offering advice. Also, once you 'follow' one farmer, this may help you to find many more.

Trade and industry publications

There are several newspapers, magazines and journals aimed at farmers or businesses related to agriculture. These sometimes contain stories or articles about particular farmers, or adverts placed by farmers.

Market traders and small businesses

If you talk to market traders or small businesses, some are happy to give the name and contact details for the farmers who supply them.

Supermarkets' websites and product packaging

Some supermarkets provide details on their website of the farms that they buy from. If fruit and vegetables are sold pre-packaged, there may be a label on the packaging listing information about the farmer who grew the produce.

Conferences, events, exhibitions and trade shows

Farmers like to keep up to date with what's going on in their industry, so will often attend conferences, talks and events. Some of these events will be exclusive to farmers, but others will be open to members of the public (or representatives of gleaning projects!). Exhibitions and trade shows are also good places to meet farmers face-to-face.

CONTACTING FARMERS

You are most likely to get the best response if you can actually speak to the farmer, so where possible try to contact them by telephone. Once you've established contact, it's often good to follow up by sending an email with further information.

Before you pick up the phone, it's good to plan through what you want to say. Write down a few ideas for how you might open the conversation – i.e. what is the first thing you will say when the farmer answers the phone. Remember that farmers are busy people: they're unlikely to have much time for long phone calls, so it's important to be succinct.

Here are some things to bear in mind when speaking with farmers.

Be tactful in your approach

Keep in mind that food waste is almost always a sensitive topic for farmers. If they do have crops that they are unable to sell, this means they will be losing money – as well as the time, energy and dedication they put into growing those crops. Farmers more than anyone dislike the idea of good food going to waste.



FARMING CASE STUDY FROM THE UK

In 2014, Kent farmer Geoff Philpott found himself with several tons of cauliflower and cabbages that had been rejected by supermarkets and were destined to become waste.

Warm weather had caused the cauliflowers to grow more quickly than usual, which meant that his crops were ready to harvest before the supermarkets wanted them. Geoff got in touch with Feedback, who arranged a gleaning day with 14 volunteers. They rescued 5.2 tons of cauliflowers and cabbages, which were then distributed to charities throughout the UK.

Geoff said that it was “a great pleasure to have the volunteers on the farm and great to see them enjoying themselves... it’s a bonus for us to have the opportunity to show people what we do and how we do things on the farm. It was good to see our products go to good use rather than the crops getting ploughed back into the ground”.

He added that “The idea of gleaning fresh vegetables that do not meet today’s ‘high appearance’ criteria, but that are still very good, is a fantastic idea that helps a lot of less fortunate people”.

People think of ‘waste’ differently

Imagine a farmer who, in an average year, cannot sell 40% of the cabbages that they grow because those cabbages do not meet cosmetic standards. The farmer might not regard this 40% as “waste” because it happens every year and is effectively planned for (this is another primary cause of food waste: farmers deliberately over-planting their field to ensure against under-supplying contracts). So if you were to call that farmer and ask if they have any waste, they could quite reasonably answer “no”. However, if instead you enquire about un-harvested, surplus, downgraded, out-graded or rejected produce... you may receive a very different answer.

There is no single, correct approach. The point is that not all farmers have the same interpretation of food waste; and certain words, phrases or approaches can mean different things to different farmers. So it can sometimes be useful to try phrasing a particular question in more than one way (without doing this so much that you annoy the farmer!).

Waste occurs at different stages of the process

The word ‘gleaning’ typically refers to harvesting crops leftover in the field, but remember that fruit

and vegetables often get wasted at other stages of the process – e.g. in the packing & grading shed. Explain to the farmer that you want to know about any surplus crops, not only those left in the field.

A little goes a long way

Sometimes farmers may assume that you are only interested in relatively large quantities of surplus produce. So it’s worth letting the farmer know that even a few hundred kilograms of produce may be very valuable to the charities who receive your donations of gleaned fruit and vegetables.

Gleaners can pick and choose

Labour is one of the most expensive input-costs for farmers, so they are used to making decisions based on economics and efficiency. For example, an apple farmer might estimate that only 30% of the fruit in one particular orchard is good enough to sell – in which case it might not be cost-efficient to pay their labourers to work in that orchard. But this same consideration does not affect gleaners, who volunteer their time. Gleaners may also be able to pick a higher percentage of the fruit, because unlike the farmer they do not have to worry about the usual cosmetic standards imposed by supermarkets.

Gleaners can also avoid picking anything that the farmer is going to sell. Staying with the example of apples, farmers sometimes plant different species of apple tree in the same orchard: often this is to ensure cross-pollination. But the farmer may only intend (or be able) to sell one variety of apples. In this case you can happily advise the farmer that you will pick only the apple varieties that are not intended for sale.

Good times to call

- If you are calling a landline, you are most likely to get hold of a farmer either early in the morning, during their lunch break, or at the end of the working day.
- If it's a relatively large farm that you are contacting, it's possible that you will initially speak to a receptionist or secretary rather than the farmer, so call during normal working hours: you can then either ask for the farmer's mobile number, or leave a message and ask for them to call you back.
- If you are calling an agribusiness, it may be best to speak with the marketing department or production department, who will deal with enquiries about gleaning.

FINDING FARMERS AND GROWERS

Farmers may have several concerns in regard to gleaning, for example.

- Health & Safety
- Insurance
- Legal issues – for example, if someone got ill from eating the gleaned food)
- Media coverage
- Concerns about giving away food for free, and how that might affect their business or their customers
- How much work that they (the farmer) or their employees will have to do
- Letting strangers onto their land or property
- Leaving volunteers unsupervised in their fields

Consider all of these things in advance and prepare how you would respond if they came up in your conversation with the farmer. As part of that preparation, you may realise that you haven't fully considered all of these issues... in which case it's worth spending some time working them through.

Feedback have developed an extensive 'Question & Answer' document, based on their experience of speaking with UK farmers to uncover waste at every part of the process, recruiting farmers to host gleaning days, and dealing with all of the above concerns. Feedback are happy to provide a copy of this document on request.