

Farm to Food Assistance

What **farmers** and **food pantry managers** need to know



Farm Food Recovery Efforts

Donating surplus products to prevent wasted food



Pantry Purchases of Farm Products

Supplying specific items through standing orders.



Liability protections



Tax credits for donation



Finding volunteers



Food safety



Setting up purchasing orders



Connecting with food recovery groups



Deciding which farm products are a good fit

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Food Recovery / Gleaning Options

Provide access to fresher produce than can be sourced from grocery store donations by building community collaborations between food assistance sites and local farmers.



Gleaning is the ancient practice of collecting leftover crops from fields that would not otherwise be harvested and would go to waste.

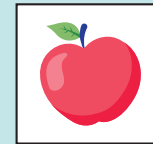
Today the term is applied to many food recovery activities.

“After Market” Donations from Farmers Markets

Many farmers markets coordinate regular donations of unsold produce to local organizations. Special pop-up markets also need to plan for what will be done with surplus to avoid wasted food. These are opportunities to identify nearby food assistance sites or food recovery groups and help determine if they are interested in receiving after-market produce donations. Some food recovery partners may take care of the pickup and transportation of these donations to the pantry site.

Gleaning / On-Farm “Pre-harvest” Food Recovery

Farms may form relationships with nearby food assistance sites to receive produce directly from the farm that would otherwise go to waste. The farm could also work with gleaning or “food recovery” groups that redistribute to their pantry networks. At times, farms donate already harvested crops that will remain unsold due to canceled orders or packaging mistakes, but most often this type of recovery involves groups of volunteers coming to harvest the produce directly from the fields that would otherwise be left to waste.

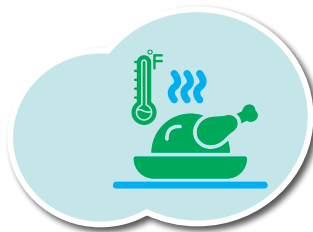


The US Environmental Protection Agency published an overview of [Food](#)

[Donation Basics](#) which lists many resources for various parts of the process

Food Safety

Establishing and following proper food safety measures is essential. Gleaners should follow the farm’s established harvest and produce handling procedures. Take care at each stage of the process (harvest, transport, storage, and distribution) to maintain food safety:

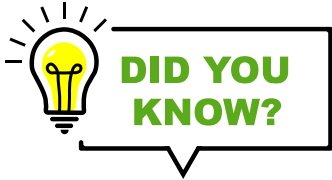


- Follow proper handwashing at each step
- Harvest and transport products in clean, food-safe containers
- Check use-by dates on any packaged products
- Discard damaged and contaminated items
- Store items at proper temperatures for fresh, refrigerated, or frozen products
- Keep raw food and ready-to-eat foods separate
- Use pallets, shelves, or other ways to maintain 6 inches of distance between products on the floor or other surfaces
- Distribute items with a “first in, first out” rotation
- Remind recipients to wash produce at home before eating

All gleaning and pantry volunteers should be trained in food safety. This 15-minute [training video](#) provides an overview of key safety practices. The Maryland Food Bank has food safety [resources](#) to illustrate proper transportation and storage practices.

To access resources on topics referenced here, visit go.umd.edu/FarmtoFoodAssistance

Liability Protections for Food Donation



Farmers, organizations, and individuals engaged in produce donation activities enjoy broad liability protections. [The Bill Emerson “Good Samaritan” Food Donation Act](#), passed by the U.S.



Congress in 1996 and updated in 2023, protects farms and pantries that donate food in good faith from liability concerns related to donated food and food recovery activities in Maryland. In the 2023 update, these protections have been extended to apply not only to farms and non-profit organizations but also individuals seeking to recover farm products for their direct personal use. The law only excludes cases of “intentional misconduct” or “gross negligence” from protection.

Federal law broadly protects activities for donation of “apparently wholesome” food done “in good faith” from civil and criminal liability.

Good Samaritan Reduced Price Programs

As part of an update in 2023, the Bill Emerson Food Donation Good Samaritan Law now includes new provisions to cover certain costs associated with donating products by allowing organizations or individuals to pay a “reduced price” for these items. Some food-insecure individuals may be hesitant to use a traditional food pantry or soup kitchen and unwilling or unable to qualify for government assistance programs. In these cases, certain communities may prefer to contribute a small amount to support the cost of maintaining that food access point and donations from local farms. The “Good Samaritan reduced price” provision allows for non-profit-run “social supermarkets” or pantries that offer access to food at a greatly reduced rate.

Definition of the Good Samaritan Reduced Price

“The term ‘good Samaritan reduced price’ means, with respect to the price of an apparently wholesome food or apparently fit grocery product, a price that is an amount not greater than the cost of handling, administering, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, and distributing the apparently wholesome food or apparently fit grocery product.”

As the definition states, this price must be no more than the actual costs incurred to facilitate the process of donation and distribution of the donated food.

Federal law broadly protects activities for donation of “apparently wholesome” food done “in good faith” from civil and criminal liability.

Note: The Good Samaritan Reduced Price only applies when the donations are being facilitated by a non-profit or other food assistance program. If a farm or other business donates directly to an individual in need, liability protections will apply only if those donations are made free of charge.

Tax Credits for Farm Donations



DID YOU KNOW?

There are federal and state tax credits available for donated farm products. Farmers can lower their federal and MD state business taxes, deducting the value of donated products.

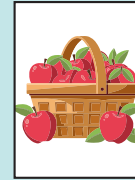


Federal Credits

- See the [Federal Tax Deduction Guide](#) from the Society of St. Andrew (SoSA)'s End Hunger program.
- Refer to the [Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic's Federal Enhanced Tax Deduction for Food Donation, a Legal Guide \(pdf\)](#) for information on enhanced tax deductions available to businesses donating food.

Maryland State Tax Credit for Farm Donations Process

Claim 100% of wholesale value for all farm products donated for human consumption to lower a farm business' state tax responsibility (Farmers Feeding Families Act of 2022). Applies to Maryland-grown fruit, vegetables, eggs, dairy, and meat products. Individual farm businesses can qualify for up to \$5,000 per year tax reduction through the [Maryland Food Donation Program](#). Please note that the credit is calculated in the standard *wholesale* price for these products in Maryland, not the retail price that an individual farm would charge a customer for the product.



Some common produce units may be unfamiliar to food assistance sites (bushel, crate, etc.).

Use this resource to understand how these correspond to pounds or individual units ["Pecks to Pounds" Chart](#) from the University of Wisconsin Extension.

How does the process work?

Non-profit 501c3 organizations

- Apply with the MDA to become a registered "tax credit certificate administrator"
- Follow basic food safety practices
- Record items and amounts by volume or use a certified scale
- Complete the producer donation form for each donation from the individual farm. Include the donation date and the weight (or volume) of each product donated
- Send the donation records to the MDA (email to marylands.best@maryland.gov.)

Farmers

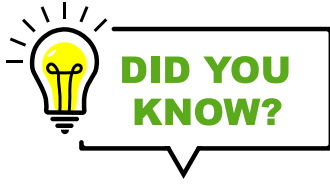
- Select a non-profit organization who can register with the MDA for this program
- Coordinate together the delivery and recording of the donation items and amounts
- Receive a letter certifying the dollar value of the donated produce and amount of tax credit (the MDA will use the donations records provided by the non-profit recipient to create the letter)

Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA)

- Receives the donation record from the non-profit and assigns a value based on the wholesale commodity price for those items and the volume of product
- Sends a letter annually to the farmer, non-profit recipient, and the state comptroller to certify the amount of the tax deduction the farm qualifies for

To access resources on topics referenced here, visit go.umd.edu/FarmtoFoodAssistance

Connecting with Maryland Food Recovery Groups



Several organizations in Maryland support reducing wasted food through donations. The National Gleaning Project maintains a list [online here](#): You can also search for groups near you by looking for “food rescue,”

“gleaning,” or “food recovery” groups. Some of the main gleaning programs in the state of Maryland are:

Maryland Farm to Food Bank Program ([website](#))

The Maryland Food Bank’s Farm to Food Bank Program engages farms statewide to provide hungry Marylanders with fresh, local produce. By combining field gleanings, donations, and contract growing, these farms supply high-quality, nutritious food to communities in need across the state. We cover every county in Maryland except for Prince George’s and Montgomery as they are covered by the Capital Area Food Bank.

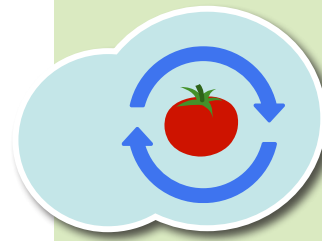
Society of St. Andrew End Hunger Delmarva Gleaning Program ([website](#))

Society of St. Andrew’s mission is to bring people together to harvest and share healthy food, reduce wasted food, and build caring communities by offering nourishment to hungry neighbors. Through our network of regional offices, we build relationships with farmers and packing houses, volunteers, and local hunger agencies to get food directly from farms to the agencies feeding their communities. SoSA’s Delmarva office covers the entire Delmarva peninsula but also sends truckloads of food to agencies across Maryland. SoSA Delmarva can work with agencies and farms across Maryland to help facilitate food rescue in their communities. Our twin goal is to eliminate wasted food and get nutritious food to food-insecure people.

Other Groups

- **Food Rescue US** ([website](#)) There are several branches in Maryland
- **Community Food Rescue** ([website](#)) Operates in Montgomery County in association with the Manna Food Center
- **Nourish Now** ([website](#)) Another Montgomery County-based food recovery organization

For Maryland counties that don’t have an organized approach to gleaning, consider reaching out to county-based groups such as food councils, wasted food reduction projects, or local health improvement coalitions to gauge the level of support to help establish a program. There are resources available to help with these conversations. The [USDA’s Let’s Glean Toolkit](#) is a great place to start.



Steps for Success in Food Recovery / Gleaning Programs

Recruit Gleaning Volunteers

Whether working with one of these food recovery groups or establishing a direct relationship between a farm and a food pantry, organizing volunteer support is often a key factor for success. When assessing who may be available to help glean, transport, and distribute farm donations, consider:

- **Time of year**

Some school- or college-based groups' availability will be different in the summer versus the spring/fall when classes are in session. There may be particular interest from some organizations just before the holidays to glean for large Thanksgiving distributions, for example.

- **Motivations**

Beyond an interest in food access, there can be other factors that would sustain a connection with some volunteers. For example, earning service learning hours makes this an attractive activity for some students and taps into a perennial volunteer base. Some corporations offer paid volunteer time for employees or use these types of activities as team-building exercises.

- **Scheduling**

Gleaning opportunities may come as something spur of the moment, and other times they can be scheduled farther in advance. As you identify volunteers, recognize that different groups may be needed depending on how much advance notice can be provided.



Contact your school district's [Service Learning Coordinator](#) to determine if earning student service-learning credit for non-profit-led food recovery is an approved activity. When involving minors in gleaning programs, ensure proper supervision and safety for younger volunteers.

Develop a supportive volunteer base by reaching out to service-focused groups like:

- 4-H clubs or the Scouts
- Faith-based organizations
- Corporate volunteering programs.
- College clubs / greek life
- Sites such as [serve.gov](#) and [volunteermatch.org](#)

Determine Which Farm Products Are a Good Fit

Farm products come in a wide variety and have a range of food handling requirements. Different supports and infrastructure are needed depending on the type of items sourced from local farms.



Category 1

Items that keep well for several days and have fewer storage requirements. If not chilled previously, these items can usually be stored at room temperature out of direct sunlight.

Example Items:

Fresh corn, potatoes, squash, pumpkins, apples, melons, peppers, onions, cabbage



Category 2

Refrigeration may not be required, but products quickly spoil and are more easily contaminated. Supplies such as shallow bins to prevent crushing or more packaging to prevent wilting may be needed.

Example items:

fresh berries, ripe tomatoes, ripe peaches, leafy greens, lettuce, carrots



Category 3

These items need extra care and equipment: Refrigeration, freezers, and/or insulated containers will be needed. Must keep food safety temperature records. Higher risk items for elders and young children.

Example items:

Meat, dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt), eggs, sprouts/ microgreens, and any items already frozen or refrigerated



To access resources on topics referenced here, visit go.umd.edu/FarmtoFoodAssistance

Key Questions to Consider

Farm-to-food assistance collaborations come with great rewards but require thoughtful planning and self-awareness. Here are some questions farmers and food assistance sites should reflect on when exploring a new collaboration:

Food Assistance Sites

1. What limits or flexibility do you have for receiving and distributing fresh products?
 - If there are last minute offers of produce, would you be able to shift or expand your normal way of operating?
 - Determine what schedule works for you to receive produce consistently, being realistic about your capacity. If it would be a challenge to receive and distribute each week, make sure you are clear upfront about how much and how often you would be able to accept fresh farm products. It's better to "right size" than to overcommit.
2. What kind of **vehicles** do you have access to?
 - Some pantries rent vans or partner with someone with a truck to assist with transportation from the farm to the food pantry.
3. **Is cold storage needed** and if so, what kind?
 - Many vegetables and fruits, if they have not been refrigerated already, can be stored at room temperature. Keeping items out of the sun, covered to protect from contamination, and dry will help preserve freshness.
 - Meat and dairy products need to be kept at proper temperatures for food safety. For short times, coolers may suffice to transport and distribute the items.
4. What **other equipment** does the pantry already have or what would be needed? For example:
 - Tarps to cover open-bed trucks during transport or storage
 - Pallets or other means to keep donations at least 6 inches from the floor
5. Can you develop connections with people who can do some of the **"last mile" delivery**?
 - Some sites offer gleaned items not just to pantry visitors, but also to those who can take a box and distribute food among their close neighbors, homebound elders, or others unable to come to the pantry. Are there **opportunities to become a collaborative hub** to move larger quantities of produce quickly by working with others?
6. Do you have a plan for any **food items that are too low quality** or too damaged to be given out to people?
 - Some pantries make connections with neighbors or farmers who keep pigs, chickens, goats, or other animals who would value items that are too far gone or bruised for pantry distribution. If meat or dairy products would be used this way, see regulations for animal products waste.
 - If a local municipality or business collects food scraps for composting, reach out to see whether these waste items could be included in those programs and used to make compost.
7. Do you have a plan for **disposing of cardboard and other packaging** that remains once the farm products are distributed?
 - Sometimes reusable crates or waxed boxes can be returned to the farmer. Other times cardboard boxes or large cardboard bins will need to be recycled at the pantry.

Farmers

- Could on-farm gleaning or after-market donations **reduce wasted food** in your operations?
- When during the week / month / year are there opportunities to redirect **surplus or unsellable items**?
- What kind of transportation support could you offer? For instance, if you already transport items to market, could you drop produce for donation nearby?
- What logistical information or understanding about how the pantry operates should be clarified?
- Would you like to claim Maryland state tax credits for food donations? If so, you'll need to work with a non-profit site registered with the Maryland Department of Agriculture and record the weight or volume of each item donated.

To access resources on topics referenced here, visit go.umd.edu/FarmtoFoodAssistance

Purchasing Farm Products for Food Assistance

Getting Started

There are several reasons food pantries may want to purchase from local farms:

- Provide specific items of interest to the community
- Support local businesses
- Expand from non-perishable foods to fresh products

Depending on the amount and variety of items, it may work better to set up a regular, ongoing order that covers the whole season, or to make smaller weekly or monthly purchases.

In either case, a good time to discuss starting a new arrangement is in the winter between December to February as crop plans are being created. By developing an outline of what to expect at this crop planning stage, you could discuss a better bulk price than if the pantry made retail purchases at a farmers market/farm stand.

Initial Contact

Start with any community connections you already have with local farms and food assistance sites. To identify potential partners, local food councils can be a great resource as well as online directories, such as [Local Harvest](#) to find farms or [211 Maryland's Find Food](#) resources.

Determine if there is interest in sales of farm products (such as vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs, or dairy) to the pantry. Having a clear sense of the equipment available to the pantry for storage and distribution is key to determining what type of products are best to include in the arrangement. If there is interest and capacity, set an appointment for the farmer to visit the pantry site and discuss.

Building an Order for Local Farm Products

- 1. Selecting Farm Products:** Consider which crops might be of interest given the food assistance program's needs and resources.
 - Fresh fruits and vegetables requiring minimal kitchen processing or that can be eaten either raw or cooked are ideal to start.
 - Align items with the cultural preferences of the local community, choosing those most commonly eaten / requested by pantry visitors that grow in Maryland
 - When first starting to distribute fresh produce, it may be best to start small with just a few items to work out the logistical process. Items such as onions, potatoes, apples, hot peppers, or bell peppers are easier to start with since they keep longer with fewer storage considerations.

Then, when the farmer and pantry manager first meet together, start by comparing this with a list of produce items desired with what is being grown. Be flexible and open to suggestions for alternate varieties that still meet the pantry's needs and preferences.



Funding Purchases of Local Food

Some sites use "virtual" food drives to raise the funds to purchase fresh produce from the food bank or local farms. See examples from the [Maryland Food Bank](#) and [Feeding America](#) for ideas on how to organize this type of food drive.

Tip for Pantry Managers

If calling a farmer by phone, ask at the very beginning if this is "a good time to talk" or if not, when to call back. Do this before explaining fully your reason for calling as the farmer may be in the field, etc. and not able to engage in a lengthy introduction at that moment.

To access resources on topics referenced here, visit go.umd.edu/FarmtoFoodAssistance

2. Have an idea of the **produce volume** desired for each item, and on what basis (weekly? monthly?). It can be helpful to consider the overall volume for the season (such as 500 lbs of tomatoes) and then determine a flexible range for each delivery to accommodate fluctuations in harvest while still matching the pantry’s expected visitor volume (such as 20-150 lbs per week of tomatoes).
3. **Outline the preferred delivery schedule, contact person, and other logistics for receiving orders.** Since pantries often have more limited hours than other public places or businesses, be clear about the limitations for receiving orders. It is helpful to strategically align drop offs with other farm deliveries or have a pantry volunteer driver to pick up farm products.
4. **Discuss what packaging or “post-harvest” processing is needed.** Do items need to be washed and pre-bundled with trimmed stems? Or are bulk quantities that the pantry divides into individual portions acceptable? When the farmer has fewer steps to take to package and prepare the order, it is easier logistically, more efficient, and could be potentially less costly.
5. Discuss the typical **price ranges** for each item. Are there any opportunities for discounts at certain quantities or during specific times of the season? If the price and other details seem agreeable, consider outlining a simple contract describing the projected schedule, items, and amounts for each delivery / over the season cumulatively. Given the impact of weather and other factors on the specific timing of ripening and harvest, understand that this will be best viewed as a general guide more than a precise plan. Be prepared to adapt across the season.
6. Agree on a **payment method and schedule** that works for both parties. If a pantry is paying with grant funds, they may need invoices done in a particular way to comply with their requirements. Farmers rely on quick payment of invoices since their expenses are often incurred months before the product is ready. Delays or confusion here can easily break a good collaboration. Explore ways to make invoicing and payments as automatic as possible.
7. Be clear about what **quality standards** are acceptable. With local food, be prepared for small imperfections that don’t affect the quality or freshness of the product. On the other hand, make sure you discuss whether “seconds” or slightly lower quality products are acceptable at any point, as there is almost always a price difference for these items which may work for certain purposes.

Use Maryland seasonal crops resources: [Harvest Calendar](#) and [What’s in Season](#) to get a sense of what might be available and when.

Note: Many popular produce items (such as pineapples, plantains, bananas, tropical fruits, avocados, and citrus fruits) **do not grow** in Maryland’s climate and will not be available for local purchases.

Communication is Key

Maintain an open line of communication and be prepared to adapt to changes to the plan. Many unpredictable factors (weather, pests, etc.) could all result in things not turning out exactly as projected and the need to make adjustments. Determine from the beginning the best way to stay in contact. Is phone, texting, or email best? Stay in touch regularly to avoid surprises and make the collaboration more successful.

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