

Success Story

Gleaning for Nutrition Security: Farm-to-Community Partnerships Across Maine

SUMMARY

The food landscape in Maine includes thousands of local farms growing potatoes, blueberries, and other seasonal fruits and vegetables. **Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators engage with local farmers to increase access to these healthy local foods with the aim of addressing nutrition security.** Specifically, educators facilitate farm-to-community collaborations to support gleaning or excess harvesting partnerships to collect and distribute quality produce that would otherwise go to waste.

Merrymeeting Gleaners in Midcoast Maine was one of the first gleaning groups formed with SNAP-Ed support in 2017. Since then, the gleaning policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change strategy has expanded to several other SNAP-Ed service areas. In 2023, **5 Nutrition Educators worked with 60 community sites across the state to distribute gleaned produce to over 2,600 Mainers** experiencing low income.

SOCIAL & COMMUNITY CONTEXT

According to Feeding America (2022), **13% of all Mainers and almost 19% of children under 18 experience food insecurity.** Field gleaning offers a useful way for SNAP-Ed practitioners to increase fruit and vegetable access and intake for individuals and communities experiencing low income.¹

The Maine-SNAP Ed **PSE intervention to increase access to local nutritious food through gleaning** builds on existing community strengths, enhances local food systems, and aligns with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service's aim to **improve food access and affordability.**

¹ Hoisington, A., Butkus, S. N., Garrett, S., & Beerman, K. (2001). Field gleaning as a tool for addressing food security at the local level: case study. *Journal of Nutrition Education*, 33(1), 43-48. 10.1016/s1499-4046(06)60009-2



Maine SNAP-Ed
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
Program-Education

Maine SNAP-Ed is a USDA-funded program that offers nutrition and cooking classes and supports projects that address food and physical activity needs in the community. Trained Nutrition Educators reach Mainers in all 16 counties. Nutrition Educators are integrated into the communities they serve and work where Mainers eat, live, learn, play, shop, and work.

For more Success Stories from Maine SNAP-Ed or to get in touch with your local Nutrition Educator, please visit mainesnap-ed.org.

Data sources are available upon request by emailing mainesnap-ed@une.edu.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider. Maine SNAP-Ed is funded by the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which is administered by the Office for Family Independence (OFI) at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and implemented statewide by the University of New England (UNE) through contracts with local community organizations. Maine SNAP-Ed educates families experiencing low income on low-cost healthy eating and active lifestyles. Contact mainesnap-ed@une.edu or (207) 221-4560 for more information.



COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Across the state, SNAP-Education educators are building on the social capital they have established through the provision of nutrition education and their commitment to public health approaches to meet common goals for health equity. With shared values established, collaborative systems changes are more readily prioritized. **Maine farmers are committed to sharing the surplus of their harvest** with community members experiencing hunger, and **SNAP-Education educators are well positioned to make community connections** to gleaning groups, libraries, health care sites, and emergency food distribution groups.

BUILDING ON STRENGTHS

In 2023, **Merrymeeting Gleaners rescued 37,508 pounds of produce** during the harvest season. Across the state, **gleaning PSE systems** included **37 food assistance sites, 15 farmers markets, 3 libraries, 3 senior housing sites, and 2 health care clinics**. In total, just over **2,600 SNAP-Education community members were reached with fresh, local produce**.

Maine SNAP-Education Nutrition Educators provided **nutrition education, recipe cards, and nutrition information** that aligned with the produce being gleaned, increasing uptake and ease of use. Additionally, gleaning is an important component of the program's generative impact on local communities, accounting for **\$51,000 – almost 40% – of Maine SNAP-Education's leveraged resources** for 2023.

CONCLUSION



In Midcoast Maine, a gleaning system established in 2017 with SNAP-Education support is now **fully sustainable and ownership lies with the community**. SNAP-Education continues to add value through community connections and nutrition education.

Across Maine, new gleaning systems are developing, expanding, and working towards sustainability, demonstrating that **farm-to-community partnerships are an important part of increasing fruit and**

vegetable access and sustaining healthy communities.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Gleaning groups like the Merrymeeting Gleaners recover food that would otherwise not be



picked from farmers' fields, expanding the way the

community gains access to fresh fruits and vegetables. After several years of partnership with SNAP-Education, the **Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program**, a community food security agency, has assumed ownership for this well-established gleaning group. Maine SNAP-Education involvement has transitioned to maintenance and sustainability. In 2023, the SNAP-Education educator established distribution sites in **health care clinics, food banks and food pantries, and a farmers market**. The educator also continued to provide **education on how to prepare and store fresh produce and easy, healthy recipes** to accompany free produce like freshly gleaned turnips.

“Through sharing tables, boxes of gleaned produce, and different events and SNAP-Education classes around town, we’re able to see an increase in consumption of vegetables and fruit... I personally love the local sharing tables, everyone is welcome to grab something that appeals to them and they’re set up in popular community settings like the lobby of our local library or the YMCA.”

-Maine SNAP-Education Nutrition Educator