

# DONATING PRODUCE FROM FARMS AND GARDENS

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With a little bit prior planning, food pantries and other agencies that distribute food or prepare meals are often eager to accept donations of fresh fruits and vegetables. Produce is generally hard to come by for these groups. However, donations of fresh fruits or vegetables provide families with a much needed source of nutritious food, help reduce food waste, and build good relations between gardeners, farmers, and the community. Below are a few simple steps to follow.

- **Make a connection with a hunger relief agency.** In Missouri, there are six regional food banks that distribute food to over 2,000 local agencies. These include food pantries, community kitchens, shelters, and other places where people in need can go for food. Contact Feeding Missouri (573-355-7758 or <http://www.feedingmissouri.org/>) to find an agency near you. Outside of Missouri, contact Feeding America (<http://www.feedingamerica.org>).
- **Work out the logistics.** Not all agencies are the same. Some are open multiple times per week. Some are open once per month. Be sure to have a conversation with the director of the agency in your community about the best time for delivering produce, how much produce can be used, and whether they have adequate refrigeration to keep the produce cool.
- **Harvest and handle with care.** Whether donating excess produce from a garden or sound but unmarketable produce (because of odd shapes or sizes) from a farm, handle it as if it will be served to your own family and friends. It is best to harvest produce in the early morning and take some measure to get the field heat out of the product (e.g. hydro-cooling, refrigeration). Keep produce refrigerated if possible until it is delivered. If that is not possible, time the harvest so that it goes straight from the garden or field to the food pantry and food pantry customer. For items that ripen at room temperature after they are picked (e.g. tomatoes, cantaloupe, other fruits), harvest the produce before it is fully ripe to extend its shelf life.
- **Coordinate produce donations with other gardeners and farmers.** Area gardeners may choose to join forces to harvest and deliver produce to an agency at a scheduled time. Likewise, for growers who sell at farmers' markets or produce auctions, produce may be brought to market and set aside at a central location. Also, produce that doesn't sell can be collected at the end of the day. Delivery or pick-up will need to be arranged.
- **Look into gleaning.** Gleaning is a tradition that goes back hundreds of years. It involves allowing volunteers to collect sound produce that isn't profitable or marketable from farmers' fields. For more information, contact the Society of St. Andrew at (800) 333-4597 or <http://www.endhunger.org/>. They can help locate farms, coordinate volunteers, provide packaging for donated produce, and provide growers with a receipt for their donation.
- **Establish a Donation Station at the farmers' market.** This is basically a table and tent that allows customers to make donations of produce or cash at a local farmers' market. If cash is donated, it is used to buy food at the market for a local hunger relief agency. Farmers can participate too.
- **Set a goal.** Before the season, set a goal for how much produce you or your fellow gardeners and farmers hope to donate. Provide updates through social media throughout the season to share your progress.

