

**Short  
version**

# **Guidelines for safe gleaning**



**Generalitat  
de Catalunya**

# 1. Prior documentation related to the activity

This guide<sup>1</sup> is focused on gleaning activities executed by Gleaning Organizations (GO). For other ventures, such as individual or informal gleaning activities, not all aspects of this guide are guaranteed to be appropriate.

To ensure safe gleaning, it is necessary to work within a well-defined and formal administrative framework that considers all of the stakeholders involved in the activity: volunteers, farmers, GOs, Food Distribution Services (FDS), users of the FDS, and receivers of the gleaned products.

<sup>1</sup> This document is a short version of "Guidelines for safe gleaning". The full version is available on the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food of the Catalan Government website (<http://agricultura.gencat.cat/ca/inici>).

## 1.1. Completing a volunteering plan

The new volunteer Law 25/2015 approved by the Catalan Parliament on July 30th regulates volunteer practices to ensure that all stakeholders involved, as well as the volunteers themselves, are aware of their rights and duties. In this sense, it is the responsibility of the GO to inform volunteers about the law and to establish a volunteering plan.

Therefore, it is necessary to be aware that all volunteers will have to be registered as part of the activity beforehand, in order to process the appropriate insurance and guarantee adherence to the previously cited law.



Volunteers of Espigoladors Foundation in a gleaning activity (Source: Espigoladors Foundation, 2019).

## 1.2. Establishing an agreement with the producer

To ensure fluid communication between the GO and the producer, it is important to sign an **agreement** that delineates the gleaners' action framework, identifies the destination of the gleaned products, and ensures protection of the fields and farm facilities.

Ideally, this agreement should include the following elements:

### The GO promises to:

- Glean only the fields (or parts of fields) identified in the prior agreement with the producer, and within the scheduled timeframe.
- Facilitate the arrival of the volunteers and provide them with the necessary materials to carry out the activity, including tools, boxes, and transport vehicles.
- Ensure that volunteers are properly identified as such, and that they comply with all of the obligations deriving from Law 25/2015 of July 30th regarding volunteering practices. Further, the GO must contract the appro-

priate risk insurance for the activity and the potential damages that may be incurred to third-parties.

- Distribute the gleaned products for purposes of social welfare, including donations to food banks and soup kitchens. Under no circumstances will the recovered products be sold directly as fresh products.
- Exempt the farmer from all responsibility and liability for the volunteers' actions, including any accidents that should occur.

### The farmer certifies that:

- The gleaned products are suitable for human consumption and comply with current regulations regarding food and phytosanitary safety.

In addition to the signed agreement, the GO will contract a civil liability insurance policy that covers all possible damages to any part of the harvest, fields, and facilities caused by the volunteers.

**It is important to sign an agreement that delineates the gleaners' action framework, identifies the destination of the gleaned products, and ensures protection of the fields and farm facilities.**

## 1.3. Hiring an insurance policy

In addition to implementing an appropriate risk prevention plan, all volunteers must have accident insurance. Usually, this will be managed by the GO.

## 2. Agreements with farmers

A proper relationship between the farmer(s) and the GO is essential to ensure the smooth execution of the activity and potentiate long-term collaboration between both parties. This relationship should be maintained over long periods of time, because the best gleaners are those who are aware of the farmers' needs and adapt themselves and their activities accordingly.

It is important to highlight that it will always be the farmer who decides the what, when, who, and how of the gleaning activities realized in his/her field. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure clear and smooth communication.

### 2.1. Selecting the field to be gleaned

The request to glean a field may arise from the farmer informing the GO about fruit and vegetable surpluses, or may result from follow-up with the farmer by the GO. Such follow-up establishes a relationship of trust between the GO and the farmer. It is recommended to appoint one individual from the GO as the point-of-contact with the farmer. This will ensure that communication

is both consistent and as efficient and as clear as possible. During the first contact, the farmer will indicate what type of crop is involved, its precise location, and how many trees or acres of the field are to be gleaned. It is recommended to make an appointment to visit the field before initiation of the gleaning activity.

### 2.2. Visiting the field

A prior visit to the field is crucial in order to set the boundaries of the gleaning activity. This will prevent any unexpected circumstances from arising on the day of the gleaning activity, when the volunteers are already present. The visit should involve the following actions:

1. The farmer clearly identifies the field to be gleaned, and defines the boundaries of the area and the products to be gleaned. Ideally, both the GO representative and the farmer walk around the field to ensure that the limits of what is to be gleaned are well-understood.
2. The GO evaluates whether or not they have the capacity to glean all of the land offered. This estimation is based primarily on previous experience. Specific considerations

may assist in this estimation, such as the picking speed for each crop and the approximate volume/mass that can be packed per box.

3. The GO-farmer agreement is signed by both parties. Its main goal is to establish the rights and obligations of the parties involved.
4. The date and time scheduled for the gleaning activity are fixed, as well as the approximate number of volunteers.
5. The parking spot is determined. However, volunteers should always be encouraged to carpool (both to reduce their environmental impact and to minimize the number of vehicles entering the fields) or to make use of other non-polluting transport options such as bicycles.

## 3. Contacting Food Distribution Services (FDS)

Once the agreement with the farmer has been formalized, the GO will look for FDS with the capacity to receive the foreseen amount of gleaned product and on the day of the activity.

A key element of gleaning practices is coordination between all of the agents involved in the food supply chain. FDS are one of the crucial stakeholders.

Dialogue with the FDS should be maintained throughout the year in order to better understand their needs and their real capacities for storage and redistribution of fresh produce. This will help in avoiding the generation of food waste at

this final stage of the supply chain.

Therefore, before organizing a gleaning activity, the GO needs to contact the receiving entities (FDS) and coordinate the following considerations:

- The type of product, estimated quantity of product, and the point of maturation.
- The date and location for the collection or delivery of the gleaned product.
- Who will provide the boxes for storing the gleaned product, and how the boxes will be returned in the case that the GO provides them.

**Dialogue with the FDS should be maintained in order to better understand their needs and their real capacities for storage and redistribution of fresh produce.**



Volunteers of Espigoladors Foundation help to load the gleaned product to the van of a FDS (Source: Espigoladors Foundation, 2018 / Author: Rafael Coelho).

## 4. Preparing the materials

It is important to check that the necessary materials for the gleaning activity are available before initiating the endeavour. It may be useful to use a checklist so as not to forget anything.

### Visual identification

The GO must ensure the easy identification of volunteers (using vests, t-shirts, etc.) such that anyone passing by (farmers, neighbors, hikers...) understands that they are authorized to be in the field. This sends a double message, indicating that it is not permitted to be in the fields or glean without authorization, and simultaneously ensuring that the presence of the volunteers is seen as a formally organized activity.

### Boxes

Either the GO or the FDS will provide the boxes for storing the gleaned products. They should be stackable, rigid plastic boxes to optimize the use of space inside the transportation vehicles. Under no circumstances should boxes from the field be taken without authorization.

### Vehicles

Gleaning products will be transported from the field in vehicles operated by the GO. Alternatively, the FDS can go directly to the fields to collect the products. All vehicles should be identified with the name of the entity coordinating the activity.

### Tools

One of the characteristics of gleaning is that it is a non-mechanized activity. It is mostly performed by hand; a symbol of love and care for detail. The skilfulness of human hands ensures that the fruits left behind by the machines can be reached. Depending on the product, tools such as sharp knives, wheelbarrows, garden shears, and hoes can be used. The GO will be in charge of providing all necessary tools.

### First Aid Kit

The first-aid kit should always include the essentials for tending to mild wounds.

To ensure that proper risk prevention measures are put in place, water and essential dressing elements will also have to be taken into account (see chapter 6.2.).

### Documentation

The GO must bring a folder with specific documents (originals or copies) to every gleaning activity:

- The insurance policy/cover details
- Protocol to be followed in case of an accident
- Signed agreement between the GO and the producer
- Registry of all volunteers' signatures



## 5. Call for volunteers

Gleaning with a group involves a certain level of organizational complexity that necessitates an efficient, flexible, and well-coordinated structure to ensure an optimal experience for all people involved.

Nowadays, gleaning depends mostly on the availability of volunteers willing to devote some of their time to the fight against food waste in their region. **Previous experience is not required**, as volunteers will receive specific training before carrying out the activity.

There is no maximum or minimum number of participants in a gleaning activity. The number of volunteers needed will be case-specific, and is closely related to the size of the field, the harvesting speed for each type of crop, and the time available. For this reason, volunteers should be informed about the need to be flexible, at least to some extent, when planning to participate in any gleaning activity.

In the past, the sound of a bell announced the opening of the fields to be gleaned. Nowadays, digital tools are used to inform volunteers when there is a field to be gleaned.

The system used to communicate with the volunteers must be as rapid and simple as possible. The very nature of gleaning implies that the agreement with the farmer will not be made much in advance. Therefore, a group of volunteers usually needs to be found very quickly.

The first contact with volunteers should inform them about the product to be gleaned, the location of the field, and the schedule of the activity.

### The answer to the call

Once the activity has been announced, volunteers will need to confirm their intent to participate. At this time, the GO will inform them about the exact location of the field and should ensure that the vehicles used for transportation are shared to the maximum extent possible.

Further, the GO will remind volunteers about the importance of punctuality, the key elements of risk prevention (dressing, footwear, hat, etc.), and the need to remain flexible in the face of possible last-minute changes caused by unforeseen inclement weather or ripening of the fruit and vegetables to be gleaned.



Volunteer of Espigoladors Foundation  
(Source: Espigoladors Foundation, 2020 / Author: Jordi Flores).

## 6. The gleaning activity

### 6.1. Reception

When the volunteers arrive at the field, the GO must make sure that the fields and facilities are not damaged while parking the cars. Once volunteers are welcomed and identification vests are distributed, the preliminary training will start.

### 6.2. Preliminary training

Considering that volunteers are not agricultural professionals, and that oftentimes they have never had any previous experience with farm work or field activities, it will be essential for the GO to develop a specific training protocol before starting the activity. The main goals of the training are to ensure:

- **Protection of and respect for the environment.** Once in the field, the volunteers will be asked to:
  - Walk with care in order to avoid damaging any plants, trees, grooves, margins, irrigation facilities, access paths, etc.
  - Meticulously collect all garbage generated.
  - Not smoke in the field to avoid fires (there may be dry herbs or bottles of flammable product present).
  - Not manipulate any agricultural material or machinery that may be found on-site.
- **Protection of oneself.** The GO will provide thorough instructions for all actions that must be implemented to avoid any accident or illness arising from the activity. Volunteers will be asked to be mindful of and not exceed their physical limitations, and to take care of the other people in the group.

- **Execution of a responsible, efficient, and useful gleaning activity.** To this end:

- While walking through the field, the specific area to be gleaned (grooves and/or trees) and its limits will be indicated.
- The GO will specify the direction in which volunteers can move around the field, and how they will be grouped to increase efficiency.
- The GO will demonstrate how each type of crop should be harvested in order to avoid damaging the gleaned product and/or the plants or trees in the fields.
- The GO will demonstrate how to pack the product into the boxes in the optimal manner to maximize their capacity and prevent damage to the products, further ensuring that the boxes can be stacked in the transport vehicles and eventually in the storage facility.
- The GO will explain the criteria for determining which products are going to be gleaned and which are going to be discarded, according to:
  - Minimum degree of ripeness for safe consumption (following different criteria according to the product, including size, color, firmness, develop-

- ment of seeds, fallen leaves, etc.).
- Maximum degree of ripeness for safe consumption (following different criteria according to the product, including color, firmness, seed development, rot, flowering, elongation, lignification, etc.).
- Distinction between climacteric fruits (those that will continue to ripen once harvested, e.g., tomato, peach, etc.), and non-climacteric fruits (those that will not ripen further once harvested, e.g., citrus, strawberry, etc.).
- Aesthetics: Learning to move beyond

standard commercial rejection criteria such as unconventional sizes and physiological or morphological irregularities (e.g., black edges in lettuce leaves, carrots with ramifications, irregularly shaped potatoes, etc.), and instead focus solely on the nutritional potential of the product. The rejection/discarding of products should be motivated only by deficiencies or issues in the product's nutritional properties.

## Summary of key training points

1. What is gleaning?
2. Recap of the social, ecological, and personal benefits of gleaning.
3. Who will receive the gleaned products?
4. Reminder that we are at someone else's home. The farmer has allowed us to be on their property, and we must be respectful and take care of the space and any materials that may be found around the farm (drip irrigation systems, trees and shrubs, margins, do not take anything that does not belong to us, etc.).
5. Recall instructions regarding risk prevention, especially in relation to ergonomics and hydration.
6. Overview of the schedule and breaks.
7. Explanation of how to harvest the product to be gleaned, the practices to be followed to prevent damage to the field, which boxes are to be used, and how the product should be packed in order to maximize space and permit stacking inside the van.
8. Reminder about which part of the field is to be gleaned, and the order/path that will be followed.
9. At the end of the training session, all of the necessary materials are delivered, including identification vests (if not already distributed at the beginning) any necessary tools such as shears, gloves (if any), and boxes. The volunteers should be reminded that the materials will be reused and thus must be taken care of properly.

## 6.3. Supervising the activity

Given the prevalence of uncertainties associated with the gleaning activity (constant changes regarding atmospheric conditions, availability of volunteers, availability of fields to harvest, etc.), the gleaning supervisor should have an agricultural background, great organizational capacity, good communication skills, and be flexible.

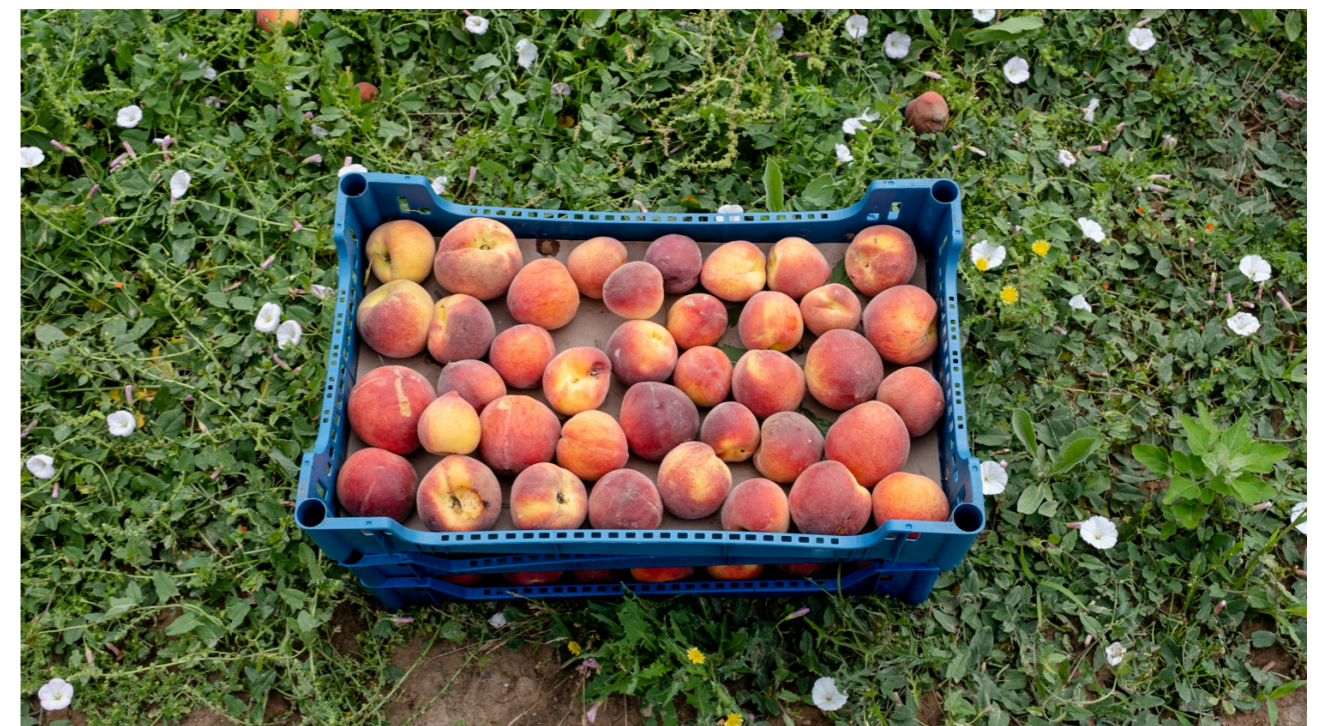
- During the activity, the supervisor will constantly monitor the activity to ensure that volunteers are properly following instructions. In addition, he or she will remind volunteers

about all aspects of risk prevention and the need to take regular breaks.

- The supervisor will ensure the smooth functioning and appropriate rhythm of the activity, make sure that everyone remembers the end goal, clarify doubts that may arise, assign teams for collaboration if necessary, and ensure that the entire activity is carried out in accordance with the guidelines defined in the initial training and that the objective is completed on time.

## 6.4. Closure

At this point, all the materials used in the activity will be collected, including the identification vests. It is also important to reiterate that the gleaning was made possible thanks to the express permission given by the farmer, and that this permission does not extend beyond the termination of the current activity. Although there may still be products left in the field, from that moment onward, further gleaning activities are not authorized unless a new formal agreement is signed.



## 7. Destination of the gleaned product

The gleaned product will be treated as a donation to FDS. The gleaned product will be treated as a donation to FDS, which implies that it will not be permitted to resell it. It is worth remembering that the delivery of the food must be done as quickly as possible to ensure its freshness.

### 7.1. Delivery of the product to FDS

In some cases, the GO will be in charge of delivering the food to the FDS. In other cases, the FDS will be in charge of picking up the food from the field at the end of the gleaning activity. This will depend on the case-specific logistics and the agreements that have been established.

The gleaned food will be accompanied by a delivery note that indicates the origin of the product, the type of food, and the amount (in kilos). In some cases, the FDS may be the entity in charge of emitting a delivery slip, which must include the same details.

### 7.2. Transport and storage conditions

The transportation of fresh produce is a challenge even under normal circumstances. When it comes to gleaned products, which are more likely to be collected at an advanced stage of ripeness, it is even more complicated. Therefore, special care must be taken during the transport and handling of gleaned products.

#### Key considerations for the transportation of gleaned produce:

- **Timing:** The time elapsed between the gleaning activity and the delivery of the product to the recipient must be as short as possible. Ideally, the FDS will be in charge of picking up the products directly from the field at the end of the gleaning activity.
- **Handling:** The products must be handled carefully throughout the whole process to avoid potential damage.
- **Packing:** Rigid and ventilated boxes should

be used to protect fruits and vegetables during their distribution. The boxes must be of the same size such that they can be stacked and to prevent them from falling.

- **Vehicles:** Preferably, boxes should be easily stackable in the vehicles. The vehicles do not need to have a refrigeration system, because with fruits and vegetables coming directly from the field, concerns related to breaking the cold chain are not relevant. However, the vehicles must be clean, and the gleaned products must be isolated from cleaning products or other chemicals, dirty clothing, and waste of any kind.
- **Hygiene and health:** Fruits and vegetables are associated with fewer microbiological hazards (viruses, bacteria, etc.) than meat or other food products. However, as they are often consumed raw, strict adherence to food safety standards is mandatory.

- **Product control:** The product must be monitored constantly, and fruits and vegetables that begin to show signs of flowering must be separated as they could damage the rest of produce.

- **Storage:** It is best to avoid storing the product for extensive periods of time, but if it is necessary, the use of cold chambers (between 4 °C and 8 °C, and always clean) is essential to keep the fruits and vegetables in optimal condition.

### 7.3. Quantifying the donated product

Once the activity is over, **the amount of gleaned product will be determined** to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the quantity rescued from the field. This action can be completed using a scale before the donation by the GO or at the FDS itself.

This information is important because it:

- Makes the extent of the potential food losses both visible and quantified, supports the identification of its causes, and enables the implementation of preventative actions in the future.
- Gives visibility to farmer's donation, as well as the work done by the volunteers and GOs.
- Enables the issuance of a delivery note for the farmer.
- Enables the issuance of a delivery note for the FDS.
- Ensures traceability of the product along the distribution chain.



## 8. Traceability

Being able to monitor and keep track of food products along the supply chain is essential, and gleaned products are no exception.

The GO must ensure that traceability is enabled and maintained through an exhaustive record that includes details about:

- **The gleaned field:** Precise location, owner's name, date and time of harvest, classifica-

tion of the field (intensive, extensive, or ecological).

- **Gleaned product:** Type of crop, amount recovered (kg), and market value.
- **The receiver:** FDS and, if applicable, the number of users.
- **The volunteers:** The number of participants involved.

# Guidelines for safe gleaning



## Prior documentation

- Volunteer plan
- Agreement with the producer
- Civil liability insurance policy



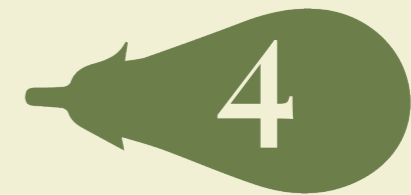
## Communication with the farmer

1. Identify field(s) to be gleaned
2. Visit the field to:
  - Define the boundaries of the area to be gleaned
  - Determine the gleaning capacity of the GO
  - Sign the GO-producer agreement
  - Decide on date, time, and number of volunteers
  - Fix the parking spot



## Communication with FDS

1. Announce the type and amount of product, along with its point of maturation
2. Agree on date and time of delivery or pickup
3. Organize return of boxes



## Preparation of materials

- Visual identification of volunteers (vests, shirts, etc.)
- Tools
- Vehicles clearly marked with the name of the GO or FDS
- Boxes
- First-aid kit
- Hard-copy of the required documentation



## Call for volunteers

1. Decide on the number of volunteers necessary for the size of the field/ specifics of the job
2. Announce the event via digital channels (social media, e-mail, etc.)
3. Volunteers respond to the call and participants are confirmed



## Gleaning

1. Welcome/reception (overview of insurance, rights and duties of the volunteers)
2. Initial training session before starting the activity
3. Supervision of the activity
4. Formal closure of the activity



## Destination of gleaned products

1. Delivery to (or pickup by) the FDS
2. Define conditions for transport and storage (temperature, handling, timing, etc.)
3. Quantification of gleaned product



## Traceability

- A record which includes:
- Details of the gleaned field(s)
  - Details of the gleaned product
  - Recipient(s)
  - Volunteer participants



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