



For IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Merrymeeting Gleaners Join MCHPP

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BRUNSWICK, MAINE---

Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program (MCHPP) and Merrymeeting Food Council (MFC) are excited to share that the Merrymeeting Gleaners, previously a program of the Merrymeeting Food Council, will now be run as a program of MCHPP. MFC, the volunteer leaders of the Merrymeeting Gleaners, and MCHPP believe this shift will ensure the sustainability of the Merrymeeting Gleaners Program into the future.

The Merrymeeting Gleaners harvest and distribute surplus produce from farms as well as process local food for year-round distribution. MFC launched the pilot Merrymeeting Gleaners program five years ago in partnership with Gabrielle Gosselin and Nate Drummond of Six River Farm and with volunteers from the UMaine Extension's Maine Harvest for Hunger Program. Since 2016, over 125 volunteers have gleaned 206,864 pounds of local food from more than 35 farms and distributed that to community members through 37 recipient organizations in 17 towns. That has meant over 172,000 farm fresh meals for our communities.

The work of the Merrymeeting Gleaners aligns very well with MCHPP's mission and strategic goals. MCHPP and MFC have both worked to distribute gleaned or donated local produce, purchasing local food to support food producers, increasing access to food through Sharing Tables, mobile pantries, and processing or freezing local produce for year-round donation. The COVID-19 pandemic increased food insecurity rates in mid coast Maine exponentially. MCHPP's programs saw anywhere from a 10-55% increase in use from 2019 to 2020. This partnership will increase our joint capacity and ensure that the growing number of food insecure members of our community have ample access to local, fresh, nutritious food. Gleaned produce will be used to stock MCHPP's grocery and meal distribution sites, which provide the community with more than 500,000 free meals annually.

"This is an exciting new opportunity for MCHPP and the entire community," says Hannah Chatalbash, Deputy Director for MCHPP. "MCHPP already invests significantly in partnerships with local farms, either by collecting unpurchased produce that they can no longer use, or by purchasing produce to help support the continued sustainability of the farm. Gleaning offers another link between our organization and the farm community that is so vital to reducing hunger in our area."

"This program would not have been possible without the generosity of farmers, volunteers and funders. The relationships, trust, and community that have been nurtured over the past five years through the Merrymeeting Gleaners network are an essential piece of its success," says MFC Coordinator, Harriet Van Vleck. "The Merrymeeting Gleaners program is the type of collaborative solution to community level challenges in our food system that MFC's network seeks to support. MCHPP was a core partner as the gleaning program developed and MFC looks forward to our continued collaboration, while also being able to focus on other developing partnerships and programs." MFC's ongoing and upcoming work includes:

- Supporting the development of Community Meal programs which increase food access and build community in area towns.
- Hosting Roundtable events to convene partners around food system challenges best addressed through collaborative solutions.
- Coordinating a pilot Farm Skills Training Program for individuals facing barriers to employment such as housing insecurity.
- Building food system connections statewide, through leadership in the 2021 Maine Food Convergence and the Maine Network of Community Food Councils.

Organizational Background:

The Merrymeeting Gleaners have been gleaning year round for three years and their impact has extended beyond this region through the model they set for gleaning groups statewide. In 2020 alone, Goranson Farm, Growing to Give, and Six River Farm each donated over 9,000 lbs of produce. These three, along with Whatley Farm, Fairwinds Farm, and the LOCAL Garden also stock the Gleaners' Sharing Tables with produce. Through leadership in the Maine Gleaning Network the Merrymeeting Gleaners continue to help grow other gleaning groups and share best practices.

MFC is a network of organizations and individuals working to advance a thriving, resilient, and equitable food system that supports the health and natural resources of our communities. MCHPP has been a key partner in MFC's network since MFC formed in 2015. Other key MFC partners include Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, Growing to Give, Kennebec Estuary Land Trust, Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and many other organizations and individuals.

Mid Coast Hunger Prevention Program offers dignity and empowerment by providing all members of our community with access to healthy food. Services include prepared meals, grocery distribution on-site, at local schools, and satellite locations in Harpswell and Lisbon Falls. The MCHPP food pantry—located at 12 Tenney Way, Brunswick—is open to the public on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Friday from 11 am–2 pm; Tuesday evenings 4-6 pm; and Saturdays from noon–3 pm; the Soup Kitchen serves freshly made-to-go meals on Mondays–Fridays from 11 am–12:30 pm and Saturdays noon–1:30 pm. MCHPP is committed to ensuring that our services are open and available to any and all in need.

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