

# Bear And Colyott Work Together To Harvest Food

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Cumberland Co. Correspondent  
**WILLIAMS GROVE** (Cumberland Co.) — Corn, strawberries, blueberries, green beans, cantaloupes, squash, and pumpkins were picked this summer and donated to the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. Pat Colyott, a volunteer coordinator for the Pennsylvania Gleaners, was a key person who made this happen. Half the produce came from Benjamin Bear, a wholesale and enterprising produce farmer. Last year 41,000 pounds of produce were gleaned! Most of the produce stays in the Harrisburg Area, going to places like Bethesda Mission and local soup kitchens.

Gleaning, picking left-over produce from fields to give to low-income people, is something that appeals to men, women, and children of all ages. Many of the people who glean have traditionally come from church networks. Pennsylvania Gleaners, a non-profit organization, is looking for more people to glean and could use a truck to help haul some of the produce to food banks.

It takes both gleaners and farmers working together to help feed hungry people. Benjamin Bear shared his gleaning experience as a farmer. He thinks it is pretty easy and really doesn't have any concerns from his point of view. The gleaners arrive, pick and deliver the produce. He recommends it for farmers who have an abundance of crops. He finds that when there is a glut on the market, many farmers sell to an auction, where it rarely gets a good price. Gleaning is the answer he has found.

Benjamin Bear gave the impression of a farmer "on-the-edge" of current and upcoming farming trends. He and his wife, Denise, own Meadowbrooke Produce. They sell dried flowers and vegetables wholesale to Ashcombes, close to Route 15 in Mechanicsburg. They plant and harvest summer fruits and vegetables, as well as fall decorating items such as pumpkins and popcorn.

The first of April begins the busy season for the Bears when they begin with the flower crop. Quality is their trademark, so all of the flowers are harvested by hand. German Status, Celosia, Silver King, and Gomphrena, which looks like a clover blossom, are picked and dried.

Planting and harvesting quality produce and flowers requires a business operation with extra employees. This is Meadowbrooke Produce's fifth year as a business. They rely on a farm crew of about eight people, a flower harvesting crew of eight to ten people, and a berry harvesting crew of 30-60 people, depending on the season.

Quality is the Bear's trademark. Food that doesn't quite make the highest grade, but is still quality food, goes to gleaning.

Benjamin shared a little about his life as a farmer. "It's a hard, but good life." He likes being on the "front edge": having the freedom to take the business where he wants it to go. He's always looking for something new. Five to eight years



**Benjamin Bear, an enterprising wholesale farmer who sells to Ashcombes, checks for a full head of dark pink Celosia for fall dried flowers.**



**Deb Grimm of Dillsburg chooses corn at Ashcombes for an August meal. Thanks to efforts made by Pat Colyott, volunteer coordinator for the Pennsylvania Gleaners, and Benjamin Bear, farmer, many low-income families have enjoyed some of summer's harvest. It takes both farmers and gleaners to work together and donate corn to the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank.**

ago, he got the idea of growing flowers, which has become a booming business. One of the latest ideas was growing and selling hard-shell gourds (that look like geese). The food business is always there. The entertainment or decorating business keeps becoming bigger, he said.

If you are interested in gleaning,

call Pennsylvania Gleaners in Shippensburg at (717) 776-4230. If you are interested in donating produce to be gleaned, call the same number. Area gleaners try to find farms within an hour's drive of Shippensburg. If you are interested in learning more about gleaning from a farmer's perspective, call Benjamin Bear at (717) 790-9261.

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