

# Gleaning Network Ministers To Hungry

(Continued from Page B12)

fatherless, and the widows; that the Lord your God may bless you in all work of your hands."

Said Roche, "In the streets and in the fields, that's where we spend most of our time and that's where Jesus spent most of his time."

In reality, George Roche spends a good deal of time in his home office on the phone, too. Lining up transportation for the volunteer gleaners from the inner cities where a good many of them come from, and then trying to find someone with a CDI, who can drive the donated trucks filled with the results of a day's gleaning can be overwhelming. He and Tom Chandler also take care of all the paperwork involved in running the network, from writing grants to farmer's taxes.

North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland all have a state gleaning law that "encourages the farmers to put up with these people coming all over their farms," Roche said.

Most of the gleaners at WAGN come from the inner city in Washington. Many are from church groups. Large numbers of older women tend to come. There are a group of "regulars" who come out from public housing. Other gleaners are homeless or recovering addicts. There are groups as diverse as attorneys from the D.C. Bar Association, and students at the Naval Academy. September and October are the biggest months for volunteers because of school groups coming out. The Jewish Holy Days were very busy, according to Roche, who says the Jewish and Seventh Day Adventists often glean on Sundays. "People will come out who will never walk through a church door," said Roche, "But when they see the tangible, visible benefit of helping people then it all starts clicking. It's for our benefit that we should be doing it. If you come out a half-dozen times I'll guarantee you'll experience reconciliation between diverse people groups."

Gleaners are encouraged to take all the food they want back to their communities. They have the opportunity to benefit first from the work they do. Leftover food goes to agencies that feed the hungry like food banks, soup kitchens, assistance facilities, and shelters. "In Baltimore there's a small city of 27,000 people who live below the poverty line," said Roche, "In D.C. there are another 25,000. So within one hour driving time we have a good-sized city of over 50,000 that live below the poverty line. One third of all the homeless people are veterans who put their lives on the line for you and me, and they're wonderful workers," he said. "The burden is growing and hopefully our mission is to respond to it. The need is not getting smaller, it's getting bigger."

The gleaning season for WAGN starts with spinach on the Eastern Shore in May. July brings sweet corn and once summer really hits, cucumbers, bell peppers, and tomatoes. This year a farmer let them glean almost 400 watermelons. Tens of thousands of pounds of apples come from orchards in Maryland and Virginia, and this year for

the first time WAGN forayed into Pennsylvania, gleaning peaches at a Stewartstown orchard. There are cabbages and broccoli to be picked, and fall brings collards and kale right up until Christmas if there are not major frosts, said Roche. He is hoping for some overwintered collards and kale in January and February this year.

And the sweet potatoes. "We'll probably do sweet potatoes through the winter for the first time," explained Roche, "because they're the most nutritious vegetable." WAGN's goal this year was one million pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables, and they had passed that by September. "The only way we did it was sweet potatoes," he said. The sweet potatoes come from Parker Farms, one of the largest vegetable operations in Maryland and the largest single donor to WAGN. They are culls from the wholesale vegetable operation's grading line, and

arrive at a warehouse by the tractor load in bulk bins. The potatoes are sorted through and bagged by volunteers, then delivered on large trucks throughout the region. Each trailer load weights 39,600 pounds, and this fall WAGN was bagging a trailer load every Saturday.

All this work has not gone unrecognized in the Washington area. This fall WAGN was honored at the National Summit On Food Recovery with a Hero of Food Recovery award. Dan Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture, attended a gleaning session with the group. But George Roche focuses less on the recognition he has bought to the organization, and more what he sees as the bigger picture.

He says, "It gives us an opportunity to offer to people something we in agriculture and close to the land take for granted; that we are one nation under God."



Tomatoes are loaded into boxes to be distributed. Volunteers are encouraged to take as much food back to their communities as wanted.

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### Christmas Bayberry: A Holiday Favorite

Northern bayberry, *Myrica pensylvanica*, is a fast-growing shrub used in the landscape. This versatile native plant was introduced in 1752. Northern Bayberry bears scented, waxy fruit on female plants. The waxy coating on the fruit is aromatic. When removed from the fruit, it is used in finely-crafted "Christmas" candles.

Northern bayberry has semi-evergreen upright stems. Each plant produces a rounded top and fairly dense growth. Its size can vary, but a good average height is about nine feet. Its height generally equals its spread, and as the plant gets older it needs more room. The plant will tend to colonize an area with suckers that need periodic thinning to control overall plant size.

Bayberry has a leaf shape similar to laurel. The actual size of *Myrica* foliage can be up to 4-inches long and an inch wide. Leaf color is a lustrous dark green above, and both leaf surfaces are only slightly pubescent (hairy).

Another unique quality of the leaf is that it is aromatic when brushed or crushed. Even the slightest contact with the plant releases the pleasant spicy, sweet aroma. There is no real fall color to the foliage, since it will retain a green color well into the fall before it drops.

The flowers on the plant are small and greenish and of little value, even though they appear in late March or early April before the new crop of foliage. However, the plants are generally dioecious, which means there are male and female specimens. The female plants, when supplied with pollen from a male plant, will produce a very attractive fruit.

The dense and durable fruit covers the stems. bayberry fruit is actually a drupe that is botanically equal to a cherry, peach or plum. Each bayberry fruit, however is only about 1/6 inch in diameter and quite hard. The unique part of the fruit is the

grayish white waxy coating over the inner seed. People find the fruit interesting both for this coating and for its color, which contrasts with its surroundings.

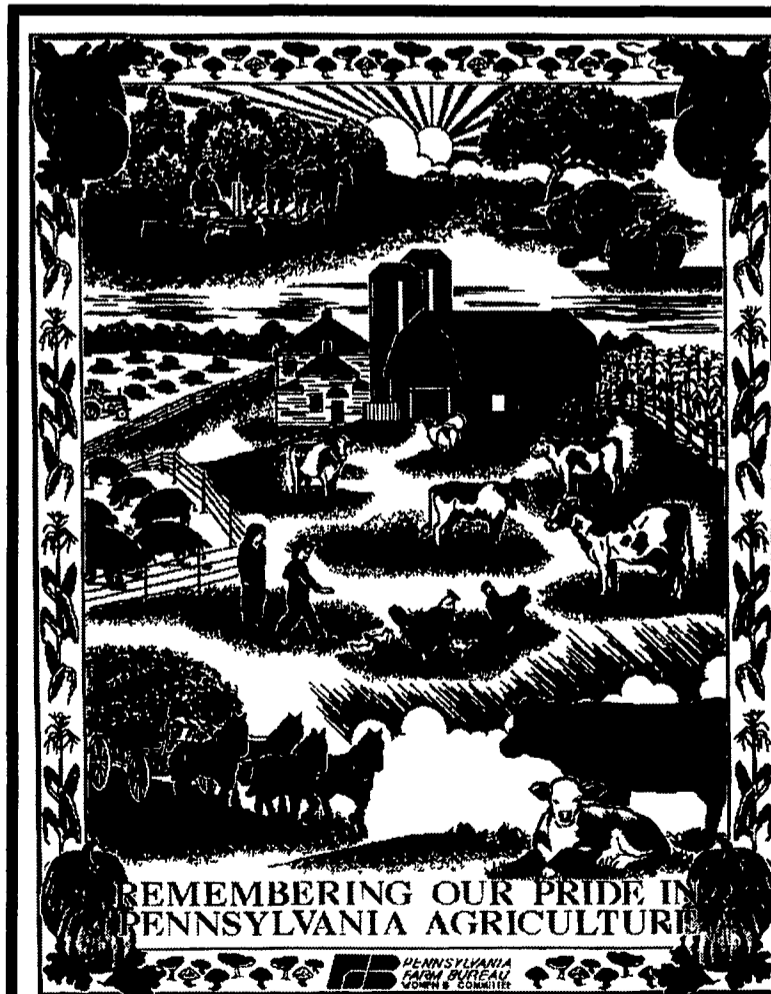
The fruit on bayberry bushes becomes visible on the plant in September and may remain on the stems until the following spring. A wide variety of birds have been reported to use the fruit as a food source during the winter months.

Bayberry is adaptable to many soil types. It thrives well in poor, sterile, sandy soil conditions where it is found naturally along the coast of the eastern states from Maryland up into Newfoundland. Many attractive specimens are seen along the rocky coast of Maine.

The plant also performs well in heavy clay soil and tolerates full sun or half shade. Along the coast, the plant can withstand salt spray from the ocean, a tolerance which suggests a possible use along highways.

Bayberry is excellent for mass planting in groups, borders or combining with broadleaf evergreens. It will respond well to periodic pruning of older stems to keep a fuller form. In addition to all its other advantages the versatile Bayberry plant has no serious insect or disease problems.

For Northern areas, use only plants grown from Northern seed sources. Plant seeds in Fall after cleaning off their waxy coating.



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