

Sharing Your Garden Bounty with Neighbors in Need: The AmpleHarvest.org Model

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Brief Description:

America has 50+ million food insecure people... people who are either hungry or people who are at real risk of being hungry. At the same time, 40+ million Americans grow food in home gardens... often growing far more than they can use, preserve or give to friends. If locally grown produce could be delivered directly to the neighborhood nutrition program, it would bypass the routing problem and immediately provide a free source of fresh produce to the people who most need it. The AmpleHarvest.org Campaign is designed to make food pantries "visible" to neighborhood gardeners eager to share their excess harvest.

This submission was selected as part of a national challenge issued to leaders in all communities seeking new "best practices" and "best possibilities" for the future of nutrition and aging.

The Problem

America has 50+ million food insecure people... people who are either hungry or people who are at real risk of being hungry.

If 50+ million is just another number to you, look at the map at the right. 50+ million is equal to the combined populations of 23 of our 50 states.



The Opportunity

At the same time, 40+ million Americans grow food in home gardens... often growing far more than they can use, preserve or give to friends. The rest is often left to rot in gardens. This food, when thrown away, creates a pound of methane per pound of food – a global warming gas twenty times worse than CO².

Our entire food system farms, factories, stores, restaurants and kitchens waste food; about a pound/ person a day or 100 billion pounds a year. The illustration on the right

represents the food lost by a family of four in a month. This statistic does not include the food lost in backyard gardens around the country, which up to now has been ignored.

The impact of America's food insecurity coupled with the lost produce has our neediest people seeking the cheapest calories they can get – often processed or fast food laden with fats, salts and sugars. This is making America both an obese and malnourished nation at the same time.



The Solution

In May 2009, we introduced the AmpleHarvest.org Campaign – a national non-profit registry of food pantries enabling millions of home gardeners to easily find a local food pantry eager to accept their excess garden produce. This opened the door for fresh food to displace canned produce, for broadening the variety of food available at the pantries, for introducing fresh food to children, for keeping produce out of landfills, and for enabling people to diminish hunger, malnutrition and systemic poverty in their own community without spending a dime by simply reaching into their backyards instead of their back pockets.

The Model

In the building of AmpleHarvest.org, a number of important concepts contributed to the design of the site.

1. People can and should be helping their neighbors.
2. Excess food should not be thrown into trash dumps as it contributes to the waste-stream and methane (CO₂) emissions. Food recovery heals the planet.
3. The excess food from our gardens should be set aside for the needy in our community. We believe in “No Food Left Behind”.
4. Local gardeners eager to donate food usually don't know where to take it, and local food and nutrition sites eager to receive the food don't know how to reach growers.
5. Sites are encouraged to arrange for the donation of locally grown produce a few hours before the clients come in, to prevent the possible humiliation that would result from one neighbor donating food while another was there to receive some. This also eliminates the need for additional refrigeration or storage.

6. And while not explicitly stated in AmpleHarvest.org, common growing techniques including crop rotation lend themselves towards the idea of letting the land rest periodically and letting any remaining crops be available to the needy. It is modern day gleaning.

AmpleHarvest.org

The AmpleHarvest.org Campaign is a new solution to diminishing hunger, improving nutrition and helping the environment in America.

AmpleHarvest.org moves information instead of moving food or people, and in doing so, we make it possible for growers all across America, to share their excess harvest with food pantries in their own community.

The design built into the AmpleHarvest.org Campaign takes advantage of “just in time” inventory logic used in business to assure that food pantries won’t need additional storage or refrigeration, donors and recipients (who may well be neighbors) won’t cross paths and that the food donated will be fresher than the same food available at local supermarkets. It’s Google for pantries.

In the long haul, recovery of fresh food from millions of gardens will help reduce hunger in America and will improve the nutritional quality of food available to millions of low income families as well as those impacted by the recent economic climate in America. As a result, it will help reduce America’s long term health care costs as healthier food becomes more readily available to those who’ve historically had the least access to it. AmpleHarvest.org currently works primarily with food pantries and food banks, although soup kitchens and other nutrition programs which can make use of unreliable food donations are also welcome to participate. The two requirements to register on AmpleHarvest.org are the agency must be a not for profit 501(c)3 organization and the donated food must be distributed **at no charge to the recipient**.

The Bigger Picture

Food insecurity along with the ready availability of cheap calories in many communities has created the apparent contradiction that millions of Americans are both well fed and malnourished simultaneously. People eating potato chips instead of potatoes and fruit drinks instead of whole fruit has contributed to our epidemic of obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and other health issues. Getting fresh produce into food pantries is an important step. Our solution to hunger and malnutrition is in your back yard. Here are some thoughts for making our solution, yours too:

1. Understand that one out of six Americans doesn’t have enough food for their families. Many are recent victims of our economy who are “middle class white collar” people who for the first time need the assistance of their community. It is important to know that being hungry, while unfortunate, is nothing to be ashamed of or to pity. Indeed, it is likely some of your friends live in food insecure homes.

2. Understand that sharing, especially excess food, is the right thing to do. By way of example, many years ago, EVERYTHING went in the trash blighting America. Now much of that goes into recycling. Similarly, excess food can also be “recovered”... from a restaurant in take home containers to be offered to someone on the street, from the supermarket in “dented” cans for a local food drive, or from your backyard garden to be donated to a local food pantry (see www.AmpleHarvest.org). Food should never be wasted, especially when people in the community are hungry. Follow our mantra of “No Food Left Behind”.
3. Help gardeners in your own community learn about the opportunity to donate from their garden. Ask local garden shops/nurseries and community bulletin boards to post it in conspicuous locations.
4. If you belong to a community garden, urge other members to donate their excess – especially if they leave for a summer vacation. Ditto for farmers markets.
5. Tell your friends nationwide (by email, Facebook, twitter, texting) about hunger and about the AmpleHarvest.org solution. The more people know about their opportunity to diminish hunger, the less hunger there will be and the healthier the country will become.
6. Urge CSA members to donate the excess/unwanted allocation when the farmer provides more than they can use.
7. Urge Farmers Markets to donate the excess food at the end of the day.