

Gleaning; The ancient right that is making a comeback in Cornwall....

The Cornwall Gleaning network was started in early 2020 after its founder, Holly Whitelaw watched a Simon Reeve documentary about Cornwall, it's hidden poverty and challenges being faced by its inhabitants.

After some shocking conversations with desperate individuals on the front line of the food poverty crisis, Holly decided to set up a project that could help in some way.

What is gleaning and How can it help in today's world?

It is the act of harvesting surplus produce from farmers' fields that would otherwise go to waste. It was actually a protected right of the 'poor and the alien' in days gone by. Farmers were obliged to leave behind the crops that had fallen to the ground or were left around field edges and these could be rightfully collected by those in need of sustenance. The practice has a rich history and is referred to in the Bible as a way to help ensure that in hard times, there was enough food for those in need. It acted as a social buffer, an ancient means of social welfare and was a right of the poor up to the late 18th century, under common law.

Today the practice of 'gleaning' is making a comeback as it offers both a means of reducing food waste in the fields and in processing units, as well as a way to feed those in need fresh produce, which is often missing in foodbanks. It is something people can do to make a difference, reducing our environmental impact while also exercising with a friendly group in the outdoors. It is a way for us to also get closer to where our food comes from and the hard work that goes into producing it!

The Gleaning Network Cornwall was born!

This seemed the perfect thing to do here in Cornwall, where the community is tight and agricultural land is common. It was a big challenge and one that took huge amounts of setting up, negotiating and explaining, but now the network is really gaining traction.

After securing some funding from Feeding Britain, Holly was able to bring a paid team of coordinators together, who began to set up regular weekly gleans and secure new farms to work with. Once the word got out and volunteers started to jump on board, the network quickly started to shift larger and larger amounts. So far the network has gleaned over **32 tonnes of fresh veg and fruit and counting!!!!**

Working with over 150 organisations, the fresh produce is taken and shared out to an ever spreading web of recipients, including food banks from Plymouth to Penzance, meals on wheels, soup kitchens, community larders and kitchens, church groups, a women's refuge, homeless shelters and many others.

'You are reducing the cost for DISC Newquay every time you do this. You are helping us to get healthy meals out to so many including the elderly and people with cancer and other debilitating

illnesses. Our meals are now totalling 330'000 since Covid started and of course it's not cheap to do this. Now you're contributing to all of this so a massive thank you from all of us!
Monique;DISC Newquay'

Good for people, good for planet

Whilst obviously being a fantastic way to help people, gleaning also has an environmental benefit too. When food is grown, it takes energy and resources to get to the point of harvest. If then it is ploughed back into the fields, this energy in the form of carbon goes to waste. When you add up the millions of tonnes of fresh food that is wasted across the planet, it becomes apparent that the more we can save the better for our environment. It is estimated that if food waste were a country, then it would be **the third highest emitter of GHG emissions**. So really it is a win, win situation all round!

How is the produce distributed?

Luckily, Cornwall is a county packed full of generous souls who want to help others and this has become apparent in our distribution systems. Whether it is taken by one of the wonderful volunteers in a car boot, or put in to one of the storage facilities that are situated near the main roads such as the A30 ready for collection by one of the superstar drivers who then take it on it's way, the produce is sent out and arrives fresh and free all over Cornwall!

So, what next?

The responsibility of keeping this food coming is very real and the project is constantly striving to be bigger, better, more sustainable and efficient.

The aim is very much to keep growing. Our volunteer numbers are ever increasing and everyone enjoys the sense of achievement and the feel good factor after a day of fresh air in the Cornish countryside.

The project will work in relationship with the Cornwall Climate Action Network (an umbrella group of over 50 organisations which Holly Whitelaw founded), Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Westcountry Rivers Trust, Cornwall Landscape Partnership and other tree planting groups. The extreme high winds in Cornwall over the last year have highlighted the need for shelter belts on farms. This winter the project will expand into tree planting, offering farmers some planted shelter belts for free, whilst utilising the volunteer groups and offering this beneficial activity to organisations working in the mental health, rehabilitation and social prescribing sectors.

How can people help?

Volunteers - Please come and get involved in gleans or spread the word amongst your friends, family and local groups that we need them!!

Vehicles - As the winter draws in and the demand grows daily, the project has decided that it needs two of it's own 4x4 vehicles and trailers to help gain access to muddy fields and tracks. A Crowdfunder has been set up to raise funds and this is live at the moment.

Transport - The project is also in need of help with distribution from existing trucks and vans that drive regular routes and may be returning empty or part empty to areas that link up with the network.

New farms - Of course it needs more farmers that are willing to allow gleaning on their land!

All in all, the Gleaning Network is so happy and proud of what has been achieved so far and with all the findings and knowledge being shared to help others set up groups across the UK, gleaning is set to become one of the most sustainable and effective ways to help both people and the planet.

For more information, you can visit our website;

<https://gleaningcornwall.org.uk>

New volunteers can fill out this form;

[Copy of TGN_Cornwall_Sign Up Form - Google Forms](#)

Find your local group on Facebook;

[Cornwall Gleaning Network | Facebook](#)

[Gleaning Group, Mid Cornwall | Facebook](#)

[Gleaning Network Falmouth area | Facebook](#)

[Gleaning Network SE Cornwall | Facebook](#)

[Gleaning in St Newlyn East | Facebook](#)

[\(1\) Penwith Gleaning Gang! | Facebook](#)