

Society of St. Andrew

GLEANNING AMERICA'S FIELDS ~ FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY



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Dear friends,

Please know that **we are thinking about you and praying for your health**. These are anxious and uncertain days, as we all long for a return to our normal lives. Our hearts, like yours, hurt every day we can't be physically present with those dear to us.

I am so very grateful for the generous financial support SoSA donors have provided over the last several weeks, and I want you to know that **Society of St. Andrew staffers are working every day to acquire and distribute healthy food to people in great need**.

And friends, **our neighbors in every part of this country are in great need**. Some of you have even sent notes with your donations, saying that you or your spouse have been laid off, or that you fear you will be laid off in the coming weeks. We are with you in spirit, and we hold you in prayer.



Donated collard greens in North Carolina



Food bank line in Indiana

Those who were living on the margins, paycheck to paycheck before this crisis are even more vulnerable now, with more than 22 million people newly unemployed in just the last month.

We've all seen photos of lines snaking around block after block, of people lined up for food assistance. We've read about **cars queued up for miles, waiting for a box of groceries** from a food bank.

Increasingly, in so many homes where people thought it could never happen to them, the cupboards are trending toward bare.

Just in the past couple of weeks, **with your help, the Society of St. Andrew has shared nearly a million pounds of food**, including:

- Truckloads of collards, kale, and cabbage in **North Carolina** and **Georgia**
- Many hundred dozens of eggs in **Tennessee** and **North Carolina**

- Truckloads of assorted vegetables in **Georgia** and **Florida**
- Sweet potatoes in **Alabama**
- Truckloads of assorted fruits and vegetables in **Virginia**

Thank you for helping ensure that **this good food reached people in greatest need**. More good food is available and on the way to them, every day. We're so appreciative of new farm and corporate partners who have stepped up to offer first-quality food that they're unable to sell or distribute.

I'd like to talk with you about photos you've seen and news stories you've heard about farmers plowing under fields of fresh produce—millions of pounds of great looking, nourishing food every day, tilled back into the earth. We've all wondered why so much waste, when so many people desperately need that food. **It's both a confounding and heartbreaking situation.**



Long & Scott Farms in Florida

The short explanation is that **the food supply chain in this country follows two tracks**, a retail track that gets food to the grocery store for you and me to purchase and take home to prepare and eat; and a commercial track that gets food to restaurant chains, to hospitals, to factory cafeterias, to airlines, schools, prisons, etc.

The retail track is still functioning well. There's been more demand than usual, because more people are eating more meals at home, so the grocery shelves may be a little more bare than in normal times, but the food continues to flow from farms to packing houses to distribution centers to stores to you.

We're finding that **smaller local family farms are nimble** enough that they've been able to quickly establish online order systems and safe, curbside pickups for family-sized quantities of food.



Tomatoes in Indiana

But the commercial food track, which accounts for **the majority of food produced in this country**, is experiencing significant (50-80% on average) drop in demand. With necessary widespread closures and stay-at-home orders, **there isn't a market for the food that was destined for commercial use**. And unfortunately, the supply chain that handles that commercial food service is a mile-long barge that doesn't turn around easily in a river.

Farms that grow for commercial sale contracts package their food for assembly-line use: 600 pound bags of baby carrots or 1,500 pound totes of shredded lettuce, for example. **These farms don't have 40-pound boxes available** or conveyors to send those small boxes down.

And if they were to send a tractor-trailer filled with **1,500 pound totes of shredded lettuce to a food bank, the food bank would have no means** (especially with a pandemic-related volunteer shortage) to repackage the lettuce into family-sized bags within the very short shelf-life that lettuce may have. As a result, so much of this produce is simply being left to rot in fields or tilled under.

It is tough for us to see so much good food lost, and tougher still for the farmers whose livelihoods are riding on the success of their crops! We've been asked, "Couldn't the farmers just change their systems and process or package food in family-sized containers?"

Unfortunately, **commercial farmers have hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars invested** in warehouses, packing houses, and equipment that do one thing very well. They work through regular, long-established supply chains. And though those supply chains and processing capacities aren't working at the moment, it would be neither quick enough to help nor financially worthwhile for them to re-tool their entire operation for a once-in-a-lifetime situation that they (and we) pray will end soon.

We at the Society of St. Andrew and all of our partners in this work—from small farmers to large-scale commercial growers, small neighborhood food pantries to major food banks, state and federal government agencies and legislators—**are working longer, harder, and more creatively than ever** to see that hungry neighbors are fed, and that sharing good food with others doesn't put our nation's farmers out of business.

Again, **we appreciate you and all that you are doing during these pandemic days to make a difference** in the lives of others. **Thank you for continuing to support the Society of St. Andrew with your gifts.** We crave your prayers for this work and for those we serve.

Health and hope to you and those you love,



Lynette Johnson
Executive Director



SoSA staffer in Florida following COVID-19 safety protocols while loading just-gleaned cucumbers