

## **What Is It Like to Glean With Ag Against Hunger (AAH)?**

by Mary Silveira, San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau

On Saturday, September 10, a gleaning was done at the Coke Farm location in San Juan Bautista. The volunteers met in a local parking lot and caravanned to the field. Then the group walked to the back field where rows of cabbage had been set aside by the farmer.

Waivers were signed; hair nets and gloves were distributed for food safety. Knives were passed out for cutting. The crew of volunteers of all ages watched a demonstration from a farm foreman of how to cut the cabbage. The bins on the back of the AAH truck were lined and ready to receive produce. Those who had been through the routine before began their gleaning as others paced themselves to get it right.

The children were given special attention by their dads or moms or grandparents as to how it is done. It took 1.5 hours of cutting and carrying the crates to the bins as the sun came out and the heat bore down on all. What a pleasant excuse to be outdoors!

After the rows of cabbage were gleaned, the crew moved to curly red lettuce and began cutting and carrying crates to the truck. This field went a lot faster. The produce was perfect and would be a great feast at anyone's table. We had a total time of 2.5 hours in the field.

Volunteers came from various charitable organizations and even the CEOs from contributing organizations got involved. Individuals read of the glean in the newspapers. When volunteers sign the waiver necessary to participate, they are told to bring their own bags to take home some of the goodies harvested. This is only fair, when they have given half of their day plus travel to contribute to the gleaning.

### **Why Glean?**

What would be my incentive if I were to glean? The morning was gorgeous and the comfortable weather in itself would be my incentive, although there are days when it rains and the fields are muddy; then it would take something more than good will.

Within the community of volunteers of any program, there is heart. At the center of successful organizations there is passion, and the camaraderie is fulfilling.

At this glean, there was no lack of smiles and laughter, and the field workers were comfortably clothed. This did not take away from everyone acknowledging that farm labor, which is depended on in any weather and any condition of crops, is a job that is fulfilled by thousands who work a full day and who, if they have the passion and the love of their labor and the joy of being outdoors, will also smile and laugh and enjoy the camaraderie.

Agriculture is not just about making money or surviving the regulations and multitude of hoops it goes through to complete the growing cycle from farmer to market, it is about families who grow as they give to the community the gifts from agriculture. Stopping hunger is a goal we all share, and it cannot be done without cooperation of all. With gleaning programs, non-farmers and ranchers now can participate so that their contribution of volunteering and sharing is no less important.