The Garden Gleaning Project, which was launched in March of 2012, works to facilitate the harvesting and distribution of fresh produce from gardens in the community to local food shelves. Their goal is to improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables within Hennepin County. "The Twin Cities is home to some of the most prolific home gardeners in the United States. Garden Gleaning Project coordinator Jared Walhowe said that if there is a large enough quantity of garden produce, volunteers with the project will actually pick up the food and deliver it to a food shelf. For smaller amounts of produce, they will connect the gardener directly with a food shelf.

"There is really no such thing as a donation too small," noted Walhowe. "A grocery sack of tomatoes and cucumbers can go a long way in helping a couple of households out with nutritious fresh food."

According to a September 2011 report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 10.3% of Minnesotans live in households that sometimes struggle to get enough food. Hunger and limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables in Minnesota are major contributing factors to poor health and obesity.

Working with just two food shelves last year—Little Kitchen Food Shelf in Northeast Minneapolis and Waite House in South Minneapolis—the project helped facilitate the collection of 7,334 pounds of produce. This year, the project is expanding their efforts to three new areas in Hennepin County—Community Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP) in Brooklyn

Park/Brooklyn Center, St. Louis Park Emergency Program (STEP), and CAPI (a non-geographically based non-profit that serves Southeast Asian community members.)

Are you a successful backyard gardener who has such an impeccable green thumb that you find yourself giving away excess produce to friends and neighbors? If that's the case, the Minneapolis Gleaning Project would like to hear from you. To donate produce to a Hennepin County food shelf, visit www.gardengleaning.org or contact Jared Walhowe at gardengleaning@gmail - 651-789-3321.