How Gleaning Organizations Contribute to Food Waste Reduction & Food Security
Kai San Jose*, Program of the Environment Student, University of Washington
Faculty Advisor: Lubna Alzaroo, Department of English, University of Washington
Site Supervisor: Juan Pena, City Fruit

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT
Food waste contributes to climate change & food insecurity.
- According to the USDA, food waste is estimated ~30-40% of the food supply & accounts for a significant portion of food insecurity in the U.S.

Gleaning offers an alternative to food waste & food insecurity which is commonly believed to improve the health for people & the environment.
- Decreases greenhouse gases
- Decreases physical trash, energy, water, packaging, & transportation waste
- Increases more food sources for those in need

Gleaning can be defined as a process that involves preventing agricultural waste & redistributing leftover crops after they have been harvested. (Figure 1)

However, a deeper understanding of how much gleaning contributes to food waste reduction & food security is required. One way this project aims to address this gap in knowledge is through the perspective of staff members in a gleaning organization.

QUESTION
- What are the opportunities & challenges associated with operating a gleaning organization?
- How does gleaning organizations contribute to food waste reduction and food security?

INTERNSHIP & METHODS
From June to September 2020, I served as a summer intern at City Fruit in Seattle, Washington.

During my internship, I:
- Participated as an in-person, case study observer.
- Served as a Fruit For All Outreach Distributor (Figure 2)
- Gleaned fruit with the Harvest Team
- Took photographs at their events
- Assisted in communication & social media outreach

To supplement my experience, I conducted a literature review and an online survey within the organization to understand these opportunities and challenges better.

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RESEARCH RESULTS
- Opportunities:
  - Food security
  - Food waste reduction & community building

- Challenges:
  - Short-term solution, underfunded, no variety in produce, does not solve/prevent future waste

Overall, gleaning organizations contribute to immediate food waste reduction & food security, & different gleaning operations provide different opportunities/challenges per organization.

IMPLICATIONS
More research must be conducted & balanced with additional observational & randomized studies for credibility.

Despite challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic & wildfires, gleaning organizations have demonstrated resilience & mutual aid through operating during times of crises.

More work needs to be done! Gleaning organizations need our support! Food system policy reform is also vital to sustain the environment, reduce food waste, & promote long term food security.