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## Ag Against Hunger feeds needy by field gleaning

- Sentinel staff report  
Posted: 09/01/2009 06:18:50 AM PDT

A dust-devil spins across the field of iceberg lettuce. There's a faint whiff of rot. A tractor in an adjoining field revs its engine as farmworkers stoop to grab head after head of lettuce.

"Everyone grab a hairnet and gloves," calls Abby Taylor-Silva of Ag Against Hunger.

Then, netted and gloved, knives in hand, students from as far away as Palestine, Malaysia, Kenya, Indonesia and Vietnam swarm with nearly 100 Monterey Bay locals into the fields of Martin Jefferson & Sons north of Salinas.

The volunteer gleaners are in a harvested field. Their job is to find the remaining heads of lettuce, big and healthy enough to collect for area food banks.

Gleaners picked and gathered more than 120,000 pounds of fresh produce that went to food banks instead of getting tilled into the soil, according to Ag Against Hunger coordinator Amanda Jimenez.

The international students attended the just-completed summer program in Global Trade and Development at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. All studied at United World College campuses around the world before attending four-year universities in the U.S.

"It's about international peace, cooperation and justice," said Chirag Sabunani, who grew up in India. "So I was really drawn to this program." Sabunani attended the UWC campus in Trieste, Italy, before attending Northwestern University.

Gleaning a field is a new experience for many involved. But it fits in with the

service ethic of these students and gives them hands-on experience.

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"We give them a taste of a graduate level program," said Carolyn Taylor, coordinator of the students' summer program at the Monterey Institute.

The students attend classes, but Taylor also makes sure they see local agriculture up close. They visit commercial vegetable fields of Tanimura & Antle and the research facility at Driscoll's Strawberries. And they glean with Ag Against Hunger: organic pears last year, iceberg lettuce this summer.

With local food banks reporting a 30 percent increase in seniors and working families needing food aid this year because of the economic downturn, gleaning can help make a difference.

"It's for a good cause, we're all doing something fairly different, and it's a nice way to come together as a group," said Sabunani. "Change the world one lettuce at a time."

Gleaning generally alternates between every other Friday and Saturday mornings. Volunteers gather at 8:30 or 9 a.m. and the gleaning is done by noon. The next glean will be Friday.

For information, call Ag Against Hunger at 755-1480 or visit [agagainsthunger.org](http://agagainsthunger.org).

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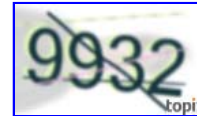
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