



# JULY NEWSLETTER



The Zero Waste Schools newsletter will help you get your school on a path toward generating zero waste through waste prevention, recycling, composting, and food recovery. You'll also find resources that connect zero waste to healthy eating, school gardens, and environmental education and action.

Share the newsletter with friends, colleagues, and students interested in zero waste.

[Sign up for ZWS news](#)

## SGA and partners talk trash

On Tuesday, June 18th, Seven Generations Ahead's (SGA) Zero Waste Schools (ZWS) team and partners held a webinar covering the ins and outs of waste reduction in school kitchens and cafeterias. "School's Out... Let's Talk Trash!" gave 94 attendees from around the country insights into key waste reduction strategies for schools and why they matter.



The scale of the food waste problem in schools is significant. Over seven billion school meals are served each year in the U.S. and much of that food ends up in landfills. Food scraps in landfills produce methane, an extremely potent greenhouse gas and major contributor to climate change. Meanwhile, in Illinois, one in six children experience food insecurity, making the human toll of this problem even more acute. School cafeterias also produce a large amount of plastic waste, which can include packaging materials, trays, and utensils.

Click [HERE](#) to read the full article.

## ZWS team gets firsthand look at cutting-edge recycling facility

Recently SGA's Zero Waste Schools (ZWS) staff had an eye-opening tour of Lakeshore Recycling Services's (LRS) Exchange Material Recovery Facility (MRF). A

MRF is a facility that sorts, cleans, and packages materials that are then sold to be made into new materials. SGA was fortunate to have Joy Rifkin, LRS's sustainability Manager, educate us about the recycling process and the workings of a recovery facility. In addition to our informative discussion, Joy provided a tour of the facility which highlighted important technology and machinery being utilized at the MRF.

Read the full article [HERE](#).



## EPA: Food waste and the climate change connection

**Food Waste and Methane: What's the Connection?**

**What is methane and why is it important?**

Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) is a greenhouse gas (GHG) and its presence in the atmosphere affects the earth's temperature and climate system. Both natural and human activities produce methane emissions. For example, agricultural activities (e.g., ruminants, manure, and rice), waste management (e.g., landfills and wastewater treatment), fossil fuel extraction and transport, wetlands, and open biomass burning all produce methane. Methane is also a primary component of natural gas.

Methane is 28 times more potent than carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) at trapping heat in the atmosphere and is responsible for approximately 30% of the increase in global temperature since the Industrial Revolution.<sup>11</sup> Over the last two centuries, atmospheric methane concentrations have more than doubled, largely due to human-related activities.

**What is the connection between food waste and methane?**

Roughly one-third of all food available for human consumption goes uneaten, both domestically and globally. In the United States, much of this uneaten food ends up in landfills and sewers where it decays over time in the absence of oxygen, producing methane.

According to the EPA, municipal solid waste (MSW) landfills are the third-largest source of methane emissions from human activities in the U.S. Food waste is the number one component in U.S. MSW landfills (24% in 2018).

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The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have created an informative [one-pager](#) to explain how food waste creates powerful greenhouse gas emissions making it a major contributor to the climate crisis.

Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) is a greenhouse gas that contributes to 16% of global greenhouse gas emissions. This gas is also 28 times stronger than CO<sub>2</sub> meaning it has a greater global warming potential (GWP). The rise of methane gas in our atmosphere is widely connected to the disposal of food waste in municipal solid waste (MSW) landfills. Methane is created when food waste in a landfill decays over time without oxygen. Since food waste makes up roughly 24% of traditional MSW landfills, landfills have become the “third largest source of methane emissions.”

Composting is one of the easiest and most effective solutions to this problem. Composting allows food to decompose with oxygen and bypass the production of methane and instead create a valuable soil amendment that can be used in place of synthetic fertilizers.

Share this new fact sheet with students to help them better understand the connection between wasting food and climate change!

## Plastic Free July

Did you know nearly half of our annual plastic production is made up of items that were designed to only be used once? This makes single-use plastic a major contributor to plastic pollution, which is a shame because it never completely breaks down, even after centuries.

[Plastic Free July](#) is the global movement that helps millions of people be part of the solution to plastic pollution. Here are a few ways to start going plastic free.

- Take the [Plastic Free July](#)



### Challenge.

- Start planning ways to transition your school from single-use plastics to reusable food ware with the Center for Environmental Health's [Ditching Disposables: A Toolkit for Healthier Foodware in K-12 Schools](#).
- Connect with [Plastic Free Restaurants](#) to learn more about their cash subsidy to help schools switch from single-use plastics to reusable.
- Find [events](#) near you to engage with your community in reducing plastic use.
- Read [case studies](#) about schools' efforts to reduce plastic waste.
- Watch inspiring [videos](#) about plastic waste solutions.

Plastic Free July is a great time to dive into the issues around microplastics. [Cafeteria Culture's](#) award-winning film, [Microplastic Madness](#), inspires kids, teachers, and policy makers to work together to eliminate plastics in school cafeterias. This film has sparked a movement to grow a youth-led Plastic Free Future in schools across the world!

Below are some ideas to reduce your daily plastic use:

1. Use **glass** or **stainless steel** containers for storing food and bring your own containers for leftovers when you eat out.
2. Choose **fresh produce** without plastic packaging, bring your own reusable bags and containers, and look for products in eco-friendly packaging like glass or paper.
3. Opt for **reusable water bottles**, choose beverages in glass or aluminum containers, bring your own to-go coffee mug, and say no to plastic straws.
4. Green your summer events by using [SGA's zero waste event guide](#).
5. Opt for restaurants and cafes that will use your **reusable foodware for takeout**, say no to single-use plastic utensils and straws, and support eateries committed to eco-friendly practices.

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## Coming in September!

### Chicago Cub's Education Day: The Great Apple Crunch with Stade's Farm!

Sept. 18



Calling all Chicagoland K-5 teachers! Start off the 2024-25 school year with a class trip to Wrigley Field Wednesday, September 18. Celebrate the start up of Illinois orchard season with fun and educational programming before the Cubs take on the Oakland Athletics.

During the pregame programming, students will listen in as local orchard grower, Vern Stade, shares education about how apples grow at his McHenry, IL orchard.

Students will also have the opportunity to compost apple cores and make this a zero waste event. Join us to Crunch! into local apples and discover how tasty a fresh, local apple can be.

Register [HERE](#).

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## Grants and other opportunities

[Plastic Free Restaurants](#) Plastic Free Restaurants is dedicated to eliminating single-use petroleum-based products in everyday foodware. Plastic products are not only harmful to the environment but also human health. Their subsidy program is available to schools, non-profits, restaurants, and other for-profit entities to purchase safe reusable foodware products. Apply for a subsidy [HERE](#).

**Whole Kids Foundation Salad Bar Grant** Any district or independent school participating in the National School Lunch Program can apply. The grant program donates salad bars to U.S. schools to give kids daily access to fresh fruits and vegetables. **Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.**

**FY24 Behind the Tray-Food Science for School Meals** This grant will enhance the food science and food processing literacy of school nutrition professionals with a special emphasis on food safety and food microbiology. Public, state, and private universities and colleges are eligible to apply. **Applications due July 12.**

**Chef Ann Foundation: Get Schools Cooking** (GSC) This program is an intensive 3-year assessment and strategic planning opportunity that provides public K-12 schools with the operational knowledge to transition from a heat-&-serve to a scratch-cooking operational model. **Applications open Aug. 1.**

**Illinois Schoolyard Habitat Action Grant** Earn up to \$2000 for the development of wildlife habitat at your school! Projects must emphasize student/youth involvement with planning, development and maintenance and increase the educational and wildlife habitat values of the site. **Applications due Nov. 30.**

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## Events

### **Talking Trash: What Goes Where?**

**July 17, 10 - 11:30 am**

**77 W. Hintz Road, Wheeling, IL**

Members of Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC) communities can join this in-person educational event to learn about effective recycling and the 3R's.

### **Academic ESG Research: Enhancing Green Building Practices in Illinois**

**July 22, 12 - 1 pm**

Join Illinois Green for an examination of how Illinois universities are advancing cutting edge research on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investments in the built environment.

### **Alliance for the Great Lakes: Adopt-a-Beach**

**Ongoing**

Adopt-a-Beach cleanups are a fun, easy way to give back to your community and keep plastic pollution out of the Great Lakes.

### **We're All Plastic People Now**

**Aug. 6, 7 - 8 pm**

Plastic pollution poses a significant threat to our environment. Scientists have discovered plastic pollution in every corner of the globe, from mountain tops to ocean trenches to inside our own bodies. Our panelists will talk about how legislative policies and innovative solutions can help with the plastic crisis.

### **Planning for Climate Resilience Summit**

**Sept. 10 - 11, Austin, TX**

Join the Center for Green Schools for this free interactive training that will connect K-12 school district decision makers with their peers, experts, and key resources to develop, fund, and implement climate resiliency plans and improvements.

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