

Reducing wasted food in schools

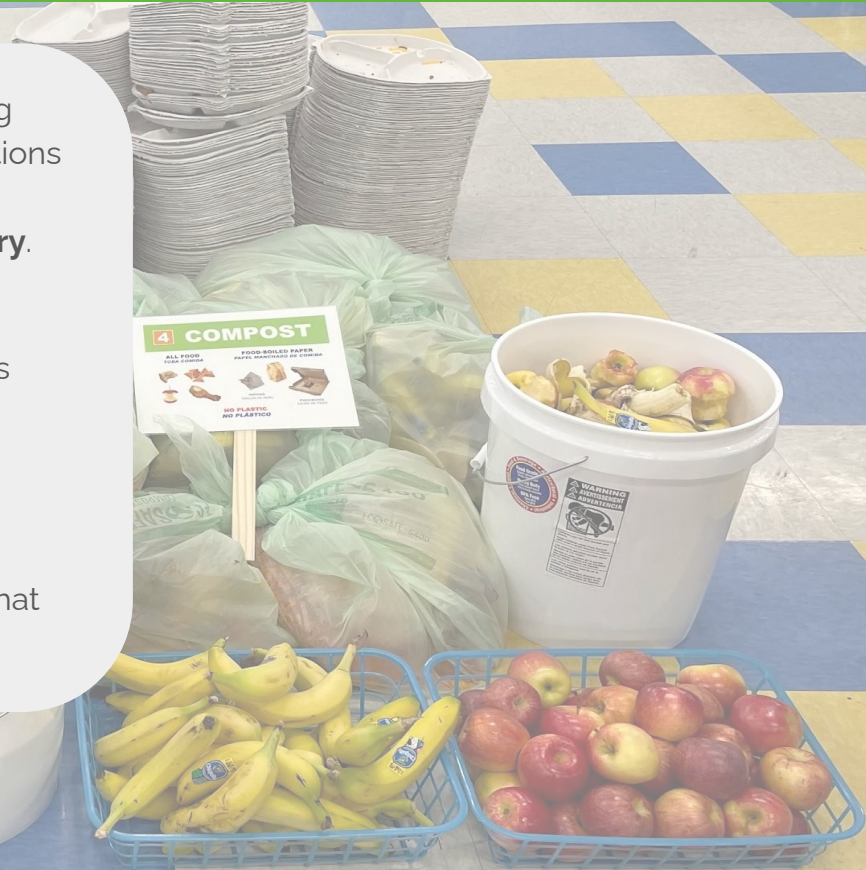
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Zero Waste Schools

We empower Chicago area schools to reduce waste, fighting both the climate crisis and food insecurity, by shifting operations and minds towards generating zero waste through **source reduction, recycling, composting, and food recovery.**

- Help schools plan effective waste reduction strategies
- Provide on-the-ground support for operational changes
- Educate students and staff about the How and Why of going zero waste
- Connect schools with local partners and opportunities
- Drive policy changes and infrastructure development that promote zero waste



The problem with food waste in schools

- Over 7 billion school meals are served each year in the U.S. and much of that food is going to landfills rather than nourishing students
- The WWF estimates food waste alone in U.S. schools is 530,000 tons annually, which equates to \$1.7B per year
- According to the 2019 School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study (SNMCS) – 31% of vegetables and 41% of milk are wasted
- ReFED estimated that uneaten food in K-12 schools contributed to the equivalent of 2.89 million metric tons of CO₂ in 2019



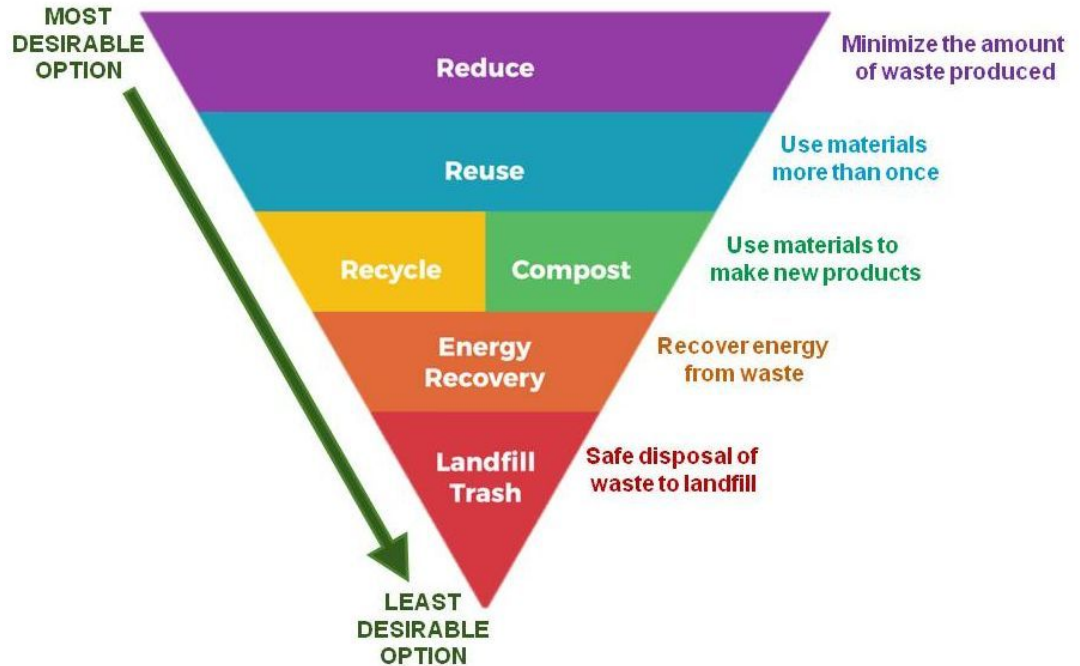
Getting to zero waste

Reduction focus:

Offer vs Serve to reduce food waste.

Reuse focus:

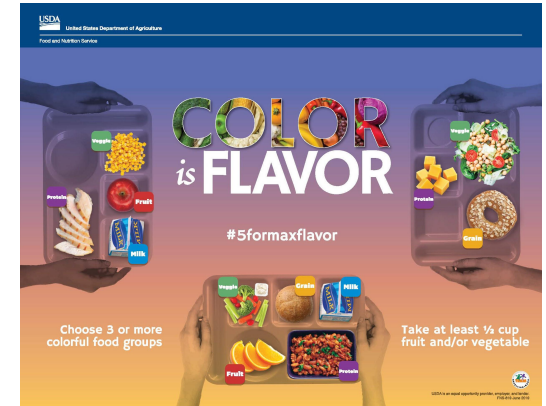
Share tables to reuse food.



Food Service: Offer versus Serve (OVS)

For schools in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program:

- Students in schools without an OVS policy would receive a lunch tray with each of the 5 food components.
- OVS allows students to decline up to 2 lunch items, as long as they take a fruit or a vegetable.
- All grade groups must be offered one cup of milk; under OVS students may decline milk.
- OVS - optional in elementary and middle schools; required in all high schools.



Offer versus Serve



Offer versus Serve



Credit: San Diego Unified School District, Sandi Coast Cafe

OVS Training & Education

Resources for staff training:

- ISBE training
- USDA tip sheet for OVS
- OVS & Share Table Training (SGA)

Test Your OVS Skills!

Which combination of food items from the following offered lunch menu would make a reimbursable school lunch under OVS for Grades 9-12?

Offered Lunch Menu		Which of the following student meals are reimbursable?	
Food Item	Food Components		
Hamburger on a whole grain-rich bun	2 oz eq grain	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reimbursable	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Reimbursable
	2 oz eq meat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reimbursable	
1/2 cup corn	1/2 cup starchy vegetable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reimbursable	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Reimbursable
1/2 cup green beans	1/2 cup other vegetable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reimbursable	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Reimbursable
1 cup grapes	1 cup fruit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reimbursable	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Reimbursable
Variety of Low Fat/ Fat-Free Milk	1 cup fluid milk*	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reimbursable	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Reimbursable

oz eq = ounce equivalent

Answers: Meals 1 and 3 are reimbursable meals under OVS. Meal 2 is not reimbursable because it does not include 1/2 cup fruit and/or vegetable.

*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

Additional Tips for OVS Success

- Post signage with pictures to help students identify how to build a reimbursable meal near the beginning of each serving line and wherever student choices are made.
- Have cashiers review the reimbursable meal signage before each meal service for greater success.
- Keep fruit near the cashier stand so students can easily complete their reimbursable meal.
- Encourage teachers to review the day's menu with students and explain how students can select a reimbursable meal.
- Post menus that highlight required meal components on your school's website and/or on flyers that children can take home to discuss with their parents and caregivers.

For more information on OVS requirements, visit:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-offer-ve-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16>

FNS-021 | July 2015 | USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Resources for student education:

- Educational video for students: OVS & Share tables (SGA)
- Training for "zero waste ambassadors" (SGA)

What is required (from ISBE) for a reimbursable meal?

Grade Grouping K-5, 6-8, K-8

Reimbursable Meal must contain:

Three of Five components which need to be

- 2 full components of the 5 offered

AND

- A fruit component or a vegetable component

OVS at Lunch

At lunch, schools must offer students all five required food components in at least the minimum required amounts. The components at lunch are: meat/meat alternates; grains; fruit; vegetables; and fluid milk. Under OVS, a student must take at least three components in the required serving sizes. One selection must be at least 1/2 cup from either the fruit or vegetable component.

OVS at Breakfast

At breakfast, schools must offer students all three required food components in at least the minimum required amounts. The components at breakfast are: grains (with optional meat/meat alternates allowed); juice/fruit/vegetable; and milk. Under OVS, a student must be offered at least four food items and must select at least three food items, one of which must be 1/2 cup of fruit or vegetables for OVS.

Food Service: Share tables

Share tables are where students may place school food and beverage items they did not eat (unopened, factory-sealed items or whole fruit).



Managing whole fruit



Concerned about collecting fruit with an edible peel?

Collect fruit in a separate bin and wash before reserving.

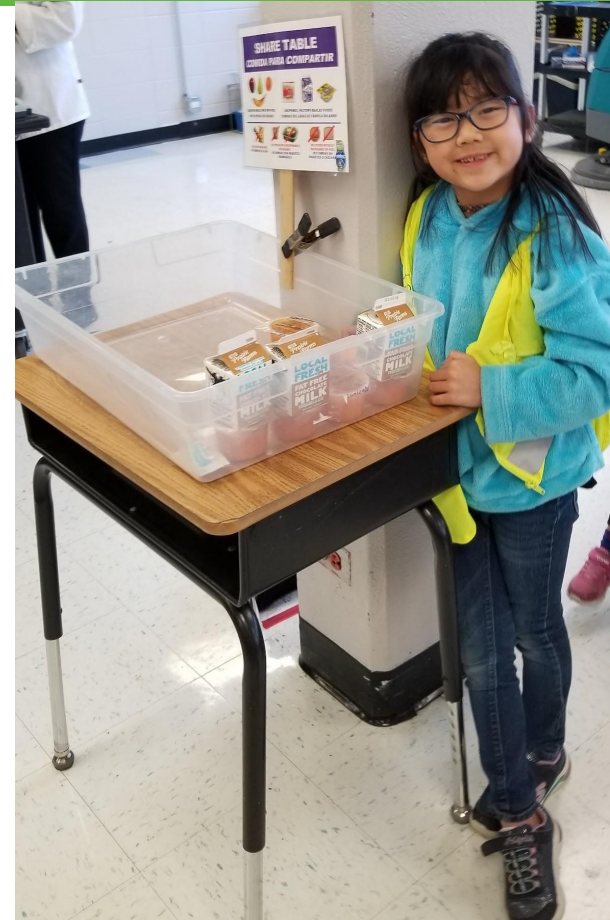
Two-way share table distribution model

Two-way share table: Students can place food items on the share table and can freely take food items off the share table to eat during the same meal period.



One-way share table distribution model

One-way share table: Students can place food items on the share table but may *not take* items.



Keeping food safe

Time/temperature control for safety foods

Foods that require cooling to stay safe. This applies to milk, string cheese, and yogurt, as well as factory-sealed bags of sliced fruit or vegetables. Schools may either use:

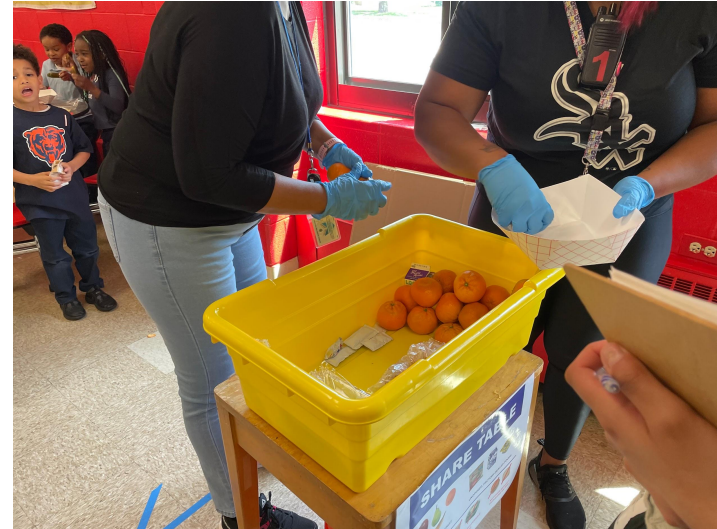
Time as a control for safety:

Monitor food and beverages to make sure they are not left out for more than 4 hrs.

OR

Temperature as a control for safety:

Use a cooling pack or refrigerator to maintain temperature.



Plan for surplus share table food



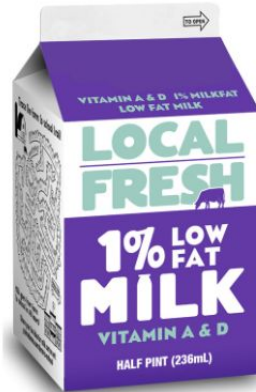
- Reserving food
 - Reserved food **IS** reimbursable
 - Food should follow “first-in, first-out” rule
- Redistribution of surplus food within a school
 - After school snacks
 - Snacks for staff to distribute
 - Backpack programs
 - Sent home for families/ share pantry
 - Nurses office
- Donated to an outside nonprofit partner
 - [Feeding America](#)

Reimbursement for share table milk and food

Take a milk only if you plan
on drinking it.

Milk is not a requirement.

DO take 3 items,
including a fruit or vegetable.



[USDA guidance for reimbursing recovered milk and other meal components](#)

Share table toolkit

[SGA share table toolkit:](#)

- Standard operating procedures
- Action steps
- Training materials for staff and volunteers
- Education materials and games for students
- Policy references
- Support materials



Share Tables in K-12 Schools

Background

According to research done by the [World Wildlife Fund](#), schools across the country produced approximately 39.2 pounds of food waste and 19.4 cartons of milk waste on average per student each year. Wasting food also wastes the water, energy, land, packaging, and labor that goes into producing, transporting, and preparing that food. |

The USDA and the [Illinois State Board of Education](#) (ISBE) encourage the use of share tables as a way of recovering and redistributing uneaten food items from Child Nutrition Programs. The use of share tables also helps schools in Illinois comply with the Illinois Unused Food Sharing Plan.

Reducing food waste provides many benefits both to the environment and to the surrounding community by promoting nutrition education, cost savings, and zero-waste practices.

Schools have a unique role in educating youth about the importance of food waste. Lunchrooms and cafeterias should be treated like the classroom - a place to learn. Share tables offer a way for students to learn about the value of food and experience hands-on ways to divert food waste.

Standard Operating Procedure

Standard operating procedures should be adopted before share table use and staff training begin. Contact your local health department to be in compliance with local and state health guidelines and follow their guidance for share table use and food redistribution. Below is an example of a standard operating procedure that can be adapted for use by your school/ district.

[Standard Operating Procedure for Share Tables](#) (Seven Generations Ahead)

Share Table Action Steps

Steps to implementing share tables in K-12 schools as part of a plan to prevent wasting edible food.

- 1) Get buy-in from key personnel, such as the nutrition service director, and work together to develop a standard operating procedure.
- 2) Get approval from your local health department for food share/ food donation procedures.
- 3) Communicate share table standard operating procedures with key stakeholders such as district staff, kitchen and lunchroom staff, students, and guardians.
- 4) Train and educate food service staff on the use and monitoring of [share](#) tables and how to properly store food to be re-serviced, redistributed, or donated.
- 5) Educate students and staff about the how and why of using share tables and post signage that indicates what is and is not accepted on the share table.

Policies and laws regarding share tables

- SB805 - School Unused Food Share Plan
- USDA Memo SP 41-2016: The Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs
- Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act
- Illinois State Board of Education's School Nutrition Programs Administrative Handbook
- SB1995 - SCH CD-SCH Share Table Program

Check with your local health department for regulations around share tables.

mi DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Redistribution of Returned Food/Share Tables

Sample HACCP-Based Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Purpose: To provide guidance on food items approved for redistribution in the cafeteria setting while maintaining food safety protocols to prevent the risk of a foodborne illness.

Scope: This procedure applies to child nutrition programs that allow approved foods to be returned to a "share table" and utilized for redistribution.

Instructions:

Re-Service (redistribution) refers to the transfer of food that is unused and returned by a consumer after being served or sold in the procession of the consumer, to another person.

USDA Regulation 7 CFR 210.9(14) and 220.7(B): Each school food authority (SFA) participating in the NSLP at the local and State health and food safety laws and regulations and must comply with FNS food safety laws and regulations and 225.16(a)."

CO Food Safety SOP | 1

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Redistribution of Returned Food/Share Tables

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Scope: Procedure applies to child nutrition programs that allow approved foods to be returned to a "share table" and utilized for redistribution.

Key Words: Returned foods, redistribution, share table, cross-contamination, cross-contact, food safety, time and temperature

Instructions:

Colorado Retail Food Establishment Rules and Regulations (6 CCR 1010-2) states:

3-418 Re-service

"Once served to a consumer, portions of leftover food shall not be served again except that the food, other than potentially hazardous food (time/temperature control for safety food), may be re-served, if the food is held in a separate container, may be re-served."

OSD Nutrition Services

Food Share Table and BAB Leftover Procedures

Food Share Table Setup

- Clear tub or metal rack for the share table
 - Container is **not** to be used
 - Container is needed, do not use
- Laminated Food Share sign front of bin
- Food Share bin at cafeteria sorting area
 - Work with custodian to not use
- Set up of at 2 separate containers for returned food
 - separate containers
- Can have additional food share bin right side of bin

OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Community Meets, Needs Met

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

Safe Food

School District: _____
Department: _____
Policy No: _____

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Food Donations and Sharing Tables in School Meals Programs

Use this sample SOP as a guide when developing a plan for Sharing Tables at your school. Discuss with your local health inspector. Exceptions may be granted by the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals upon approval of a petition for a variance. See [Iowa Food Safety](#) for a petition template. Modify the sample SOP to reflect local practices and if variance was granted.

Policy: School nutrition employees, teachers/school staff, and community volunteers must work together to ensure that unused food from child nutrition program is not wasted. This can be done by using the school meals program for unopened food items from the school meals program and collected at a sharing table. The Food Share Table is for students and collected at a sharing table. The Food Share Table is for unused food that is unused and returned to the consumer.

Resources

[Zero Waste Schools Toolkit](#)

[ZWS Event Guide](#)

[Green Locker Cleanout](#)

[SGA Lunchroom Waste Audit Guide](#)

[Food Waste Reduction Toolkit for Illinois Schools](#)

[Share table and food donation policy overview](#)

[SGA Share Table Toolkit](#)

Grant Opportunities



[Bulk Milk Dispensers](#)

[Plastic Free Restaurants](#)

[SWANCC Waste Reduction](#)

[School Nutrition Foundation Equipment Grants](#)

[Whole Kids Foundation Salad Bar Grant](#)



LUNCHROOM WASTE AUDIT GUIDE

Why conduct a lunchroom waste audit?

Lunchrooms are one of the biggest sources of waste in schools. Roughly 5 billion school lunches are served each year in the United States¹ and much of the waste from these meals is ending up in landfills. While single-use tableware and packaging make up a lot of this waste, food is often the largest component by weight in lunchroom trash bins.




Photo: Seven Generations Ahead

Waste from school lunchrooms has environmental, economic, and social impacts. When food waste and other organic materials decompose in landfills, they generate methane, a greenhouse gas that absorbs over 25 times more heat than carbon dioxide over a 100-year timeframe.² Additionally, when food is landfilled, the nutrients contained in the food are lost, along with all the energy, water, and labor that went into its production, transportation, and preparation. In the United States, 40% of all food is wasted while 1 in 7 families face food insecurity.

A great deal of lunchroom waste can be prevented or diverted from landfills through source reduction/prevention, food recovery, and composting. Conducting a waste audit is a great first step schools can take to see how much waste they are producing and which materials have the potential to be prevented or diverted. Waste audits are also opportunities to engage students in hands-on learning that addresses authentic problems right in their own school.

About this guide

This waste audit guide will help you determine how much of your school lunchroom waste stream is:

- Share table eligible (unopened packaged food and/or whole fruit with a peel from school meals that students take but do not eat)
- Liquid waste
- Recyclable
- Compostable food scraps
- Landfill trash

This guide is accompanied by a printable data form. After the data is collected, you can use it to create pie charts to show your data graphically.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, National School Lunch Program. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program.aspx>

² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Understanding Global Warming Potentials, www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/understanding-global-warming-potentials

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