

## 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.

## Education and Training Materials for School Staff

Educate and train any adults who will be monitoring the share table or managing food redistribution, including lunchroom staff and parent volunteers. Below are slideshows and webinars that can be used for training. School nutrition professionals can earn credit by taking the University of Illinois courses.

[Share Table Training](#) (Seven Generations Ahead)

[Training and Resources for School Nutrition Professionals](#) (University of Illinois)

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

## Education Materials for Students

Students should be educated about the how and why of share tables. Share tables can also be part of a larger curriculum around food waste, food systems, and climate change. Below are videos, games, and curriculum that can be used with K-12 students.

[Share Table Educational Video](#) (Seven Generations Ahead)

[Share Table Education Presentation for Students](#) (Seven Generations Ahead)

[Quizziz Online Sorting Game](#) (Seven Generations Ahead)

[Food Waste Warriors Education Toolkits/ Curriculum](#) (World Wildlife Fund)

## Additional Resources

[Share Table Sign](#) (Seven Generations Ahead)

[Bilingual Share Table Sign](#) (Seven Generations Ahead)

[Environmental Protection Agency, Wasted Food Scale](#) (EPA)

[Reimbursement for Recycled Milk and Other Meal Components](#) (USDA)

[Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools](#) (CDC)

If a local health department has not approved the use of share tables in their county, school districts may apply for a variance that allows share tables to be used in schools:

[Variance request form](#) (Peoria County)

[Variance instructions for share tables at schools](#) (Peoria County)

## Policy References

These are references referred to throughout Seven Generation Ahead's training and educational materials and are foundational to our understanding of share tables in the United States.

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

[School Unused Food Sharing Plan, State of Illinois](#) (Public Act 102-0359)

[The Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs](#) (USDA Memo SP41)