

3/17/26 Q & A

- Are the items counted and catalogued to influence purchasing decisions? Is that listed anywhere as a pro to having share tables?
 - Answer: Yes, good question. We encourage schools to log what they are collecting.
- School Nutrition Director here. I logged in a few minutes late, but could really use a link to a recording of this webinar for outreach to our kitchen staff and building administrators. Will it be shared/available?
 - Answer: Yes! We will be sharing the recording and slides.
- Is there any data on which age groups most effectively utilize school tables with the least amount of illness (presumably from the share tables)? Ideally it would be great to implement in younger grades to foment behavioral change throughout their school years.
 - Answer: I am not aware of any data addressing this. However, the same food safety guidelines are applicable for all ages. When concerned about high rates of illness in your community, you could temporarily have your share table become “share only” so that students can donate to the share table and food service staff can wash any fruit with edible peel before it is made available to eat. Yes, younger grades are a great opportunity to promote healthy habit development across time. You could also separate fruit with an edible peel for a Share Only (1-way) table so it can be washed and packaged items can be Share and Take (2-way).
- Did you run any tests for "steel cows"?
 - Answer: We did not test bulk milk dispensers. We exclusively used milk cartons.
- Sorry. would it be better to keep milk cartons cold, but not in ice and exposed to the melting matter? You mentioned a barrier, yeah?
 - Answer: Gel ice packs/cubes work well, enclosed in a ziplock bag.
- At my son's school, I have seen it used first for students to take from but then if there is still food left it is placed in the staff lounge. I used to be a paraeducator in schools and know that we don't always have time to eat, but still I thought that all of the food served in the cafeteria has to go back to students or that it can be donated to food pantry? Can you tell me if this is correct?
 - Answer: Food from the school meal can be redistributed to students but isn't supposed to go to staff. It can also be donated to an outside nonprofit partner, like a food pantry.
 - Why isn't it supposed to go to staff?
 - School food is federally and sometimes also locally subsidized by the government. This funding was designated to feed children. So, the USDA wants the food to feed kids unless it is donated off site to a non profit.
- Have you noticed "dignity" issues such as kids not wanting to take from the share table since they're worried about perception from peers?
 - We have only ever seen this sometimes at high schools. Elementary and middle school students tend to embrace the share table. Ideally, the share table is promoted throughout the school as something to do to help the environment and a resource for any kid who wants a second fruit or milk, etc. To avoid stigma, do not emphasize that share tables are for hungry kids or those with less access to food.
- What was the process like training the kids to parse out their food in the correct bins? Did they catch on quickly or was there a lot of “correcting” in the beginning?
 - Answer: Someone needs to stand by the trash cans to guide them and give positive feedback to those that sort correctly for a few days. You can also ask older students to help remind the younger students during dismissal. Clear signage is also essential.
- How are share tables effectively used when students don't eat in a centralized location?

- oh, great question. There is a whole school district that I serve that does not have a cafeteria.
- A: Items can be collected in the classroom during mealtime. Staff that are a part of the green team, will grab bins and distribute to students after school.
- A: Stop by classrooms, or have a share table in the hallway, have students get permission to drop items off.
- Are ST being implemented in MS or High Schools?
 - A: Yes, Chicago Public Schools are mostly K-8 and many have share tables. They work well in all grade levels. It just depends upon what kind of food is being served.
- Can you share more about the donation (is there a website that states this)? Some of our food pantry and school partners thought that donation was not allowed.
- I need more clear info about the donation of the share table food because I don't have the support of the administration.
 - A: [SGA's Share Table and Food Donation Policy Overview](#)
 - [USDA Policy Memo SP 11-2012, CACFP 05-2012, SFSP 07-2012: Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs](#) The memo notes an amendment to Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act:
 - The amendment provides clear statutory authority for current Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) food **recovery and donation policy** in use by schools and institutions participating in the Child Nutrition Programs...
 - **Food donation** has been a longstanding policy in all Child Nutrition Programs and the current amendment to the NSLA clarifies the policy through statute.
 - **The statute clarifies that any program food not consumed may be donated to eligible local food banks or charitable organizations.**
 - It also extends protections against civil and criminal liability for persons or organizations when making food donations to the extent provided under the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, found in section 22 of the Child Nutrition Act.
 - FNS is committed to preventing hunger and to responsible stewardship of Federal dollars.
 - [Illinois School Board of Education School Nutrition Programs Administrative Handbook](#) (See Section J-8, Miscellaneous Regulations, Leftover Food) Key statements from policy:
 - If a school has leftovers on a frequent basi...Options may include:
 - using leftovers in subsequent meal services
 - offering "sharing tables".....It is important to keep in mind that local and State health and food safety codes may be more restrictive than the FNS requirements, or may place specific limitations on which food or beverage items may be reused
 - **where it is not feasible to reuse leftovers, excess food may be donated to a nonprofit organization, such as a community food bank or homeless shelter or other non-profit charitable organization** which is exempt from tax...If schools choose to donate leftovers, documentation of the quantity and costs of the foods that were donated, as well as the name(s) of the receiving organization(s) must be kept, and ensure local health department rules and regulations. For further information, see SP 41-2016, SP 11-2012