

SHARE TABLES

An easy and efficient way to reduce food waste in K-12 school food service programs and encourage student food preservation

Share Tables are designated areas within schools where students can place or return whole or unopened food and drinks they don't want. Children who may want additional food are welcome to the donated items to enjoy during or after the meal service at no cost to them.

Schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the at-risk after-school component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program and/or the Summer Food Service Program are encouraged by the USDA Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) to participate in food redistribution given the following guidelines:

- Students can take a free item from the share table to eat immediately or save for later.
- Perishable food and drink items left on the share table are able to be served and claimed by schools for reimbursement during another meal service such as during an after-school program.
- Leftover items can be donated to food banks, homeless shelters and other non-profit organizations.



For more information about Share Tables, please refer to the [Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs](#) memo from USDA.



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

SHARING *makes sense*

FOOD SAFETY

Enabling share tables in schools to serve excess food quickly and safely addresses potential gaps in child nutrition while reducing food waste. Safety guidelines for Child Nutrition Program (CNP) operators ensure that all products are properly handled and stored until reservice outlined in 7 CFR 210.13, 220.7, 226.20(l) & 225.16(a). They are also responsible for following their local educational agency's Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan, state food and health safety codes and FDA Food Code 3-306.14 to provide the safest saving and sharing practices of repurposed food and beverage items. State agencies are encouraged by the USDA FNS to support CNP operators in their share table efforts.

SOURCE REDUCTION

A CNP priority should be to reduce unnecessary food waste and increase consumption by implementing the following strategies:

- Have recess before lunch;
- Extend lunch to 30 minutes;
- Give food items creative names serving a variety of visually pleasing meals;
- Allow students to save food items for later in the day;
- Use the offer vs. serve method during meal service;
- Involve students through taste tests, menu planning and graphing waste audit results;
- And participate in the Harvest of the Month Program, which increases students' exposure to locally grown produce.

REIMBURSEMENT

Food given to and redistributed from the share table is eligible for a second reimbursement. Federal reimbursement is provided for each meal that meets predetermined meal pattern requirements instead of purchases for new food items. Reimbursement requests must include detailed information to justify the claims. CNPs should keep a log of daily use of purchased milk and food items that are reused.

CNPs should also operate by clear guidelines for items that may or may not be reused as part of a later reimbursable meal.

DONATION

Surplus food should always be shared with students and their families before being donated. If there are still additional resources, outside donation is permitted and protected from liability under the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. Utilizing well-connected 501(c)(3) Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), schools can donate excess food more easily into their communities.

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SHARE TABLE BEST PRACTICES

MEASURE

- Conduct a student food waste audit
- Identify patterns and opportunities for conservation

PLAN & EDUCATE

- Offer clear and eye-catching signage
- Provide water cups
- Ensure an adult is monitoring the share table to for proper conduct
- Please contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Food Recovery Specialist for information on rules and regulations regarding share tables.

HELPFUL MESSAGING

- Take what you need, eat what you take
- Feed each other, not the garbage can
- Milk is a healthy option, not a requirement

SHARE

- Encourage hungry students to take what they need from the share table without judgment
- Place the share table in an easily-accessible location near refrigeration
- Re-serve perishable items as soon as possible for afternoon snacks or the following meal service
- Donate items that are not likely to be re-served

ECONOMIZE

- Get reimbursed as part of another meal for re-serving surplus food/ beverage items

Share Tables may be used in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, the at-risk after-school component of the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program.

CITATIONS & HYPERLINKED RESOURCES

FNS Instruction 786-6, Reimbursement for Recycled Milk and Other Meal Components SP 41-2016, CACFP 13-2016, SFSP 15-2016, The Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs, 6-22-2016

SP 41-2014, Clarification of the Policy on Food Consumption Outside of Foodservice Area, and the Whole Grain-Rich Requirement, 4-23-2014

SP 11-2012, CACFP 05-2012, SFSP 07-2012, Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs, 2-3-2012

M. Terry, et al., Guide to Conducting Student Food Waste Audits, 4-4-2017