

Guidelines for Food Donations and Waste in Schools

Purpose: This document should be used to help schools develop their own Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for leftovers and donating products.

Suggestions for Sharing and Donating Products:

Create a food sharing policy. A school food sharing guidance document which encourages schools and food banks to work together to collect whole and packaged school cafeteria surplus or leftover food and share it with the community.

Food share table guidance. The Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention have collaborated to revise the guidance titled "Food Sharing Tables - Guidance for Schools." The Share table guidance is available on Child Nutrition and DHHS websites at the links below:

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/nutrition/programs/nslp>
<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/el/>

Some important considerations when planning to reduce leftovers and waste:

- When purchasing, is there an option with less packaging?
- Will some of this product spoil before it is all used?
- Is there a less-perishable product that is available in bulk?
- Buy less, use good portion control methods, and use production records to view usage history.
- Implement Offer vs Serve for all grades and self-serve for students.
- Keep breakfast leftovers in the classroom for students to enjoy later, keeping in mind Food Safety guidelines.
- Provide longer lunch periods for students to socialize and eat.
- Schedule recess before lunch so students are hungry.
- Using techniques listed on Smarter Lunchrooms Self-Assessment Scorecard to help reduce food waste.

Despite careful planning, now you have leftovers. What to do?

- Determine what are the leftovers, via a use waste audit, and waste bins.
- Separate leftovers into categories: human consumption, perishable, nonperishable and other.
- Create a Share table using [Maine share table guidelines](#) for school lunch and breakfast and plan on how items can be shared in priority order. For example:
 1. Students use should always be first, in café or classroom and utilize self-serve.
 2. Set up outside the cafeteria to share with students and school personnel.
 3. Encourage students to take home items that are non-perishable.

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4. Donate items to soup kitchens and food pantries, utilizing their donation guidelines.

- Donate food scraps to farmers to feed animals, as per your SOP.
- Use food waste as composting for school gardens, as per you create SOP.
- Create a contribution table for lunch box/brown bag items donations. This is the same as a share table, but items brought from home can be included to create one common table.
- Use left overs for meal options the next day or as a la carte.
- Use leftovers as an ingredient in another dish. For example, prepare meatball subs from spaghetti and meatballs.
- Before long weekends/holidays/vacations, clean storage areas for food that will not be usable upon return. Place these on the share table or donate.
- As an outreach method, provide extra food that was unserved due to over-production to students not taking part in program.
- Create and maintain a plan for leftover unserved food. Depending on the food item(s), it should be used or donated.

How to develop guidelines for donating food and scraps:

Collecting excess wholesome food after mealtimes to donate to food pantries is an excellent idea and supported by USDA and State of Maine. Donations must meet all Health Department guidelines as required by the Maine Food Code. Steps to take when creating your guidelines:

- Determine what is being donated to farmers or other pantries/kitchens.
- Pantries/kitchens donations are:
 - ✓ prepacked items
 - ✓ items on the share table
 - ✓ items never served and still meet food code safety guidelines
- Farmer donations are:
 - ✓ food scraps from the trays
 - ✓ food scraps from lunch boxes/brown bags
 - ✓ food waste from kitchen
 - ✓ opened milk
- Items can be donated to a pantry located in the school if this is your first consideration.
- Develop a list of contacts and order of consideration, with farmers and pantries/kitchens being first.
- Establish boundaries of pickup times.

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- Require donation recipients to bring a container, and notify them of any container requirements.
- Secure a location for pickup.
- Address any security issues, parking, which door, identification etc.

Additional Information:

The US Department of Agriculture stresses the importance of careful menu planning and production practices in the National School Lunch/Breakfast Programs to reduce food waste and improve consumption of healthy foods. But even with careful planning, there can be excess food from time to time. The USDA strongly encourages schools to donate leftover foods to appropriate nonprofit institutions, provided this practice is not prohibited by State or local laws or regulations. Food donation has been a longstanding policy in all Child Nutrition Programs, as clarified in [Memos](#) from the Food and Nutrition Service.

USDA also offers programs to encourage controlling food waste such as “USDA Food Waste Challenge”

Schools should consider innovative new programs such as:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Food/FoodWorkerandIndustry/SchoolFoodDonations>

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/cnp022018.asp>

References: SP 11-2012, CACFP 05-2012, SFSP 07-2012

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