

Share Table Guidance for Schools

Share tables are an effort to reduce the amount of food waste in schools. Children place unconsumed food and beverage items that they have chosen not to eat or drink on the share table. This provides other children the opportunity to take additional helpings of food or beverages at no additional cost.

Schools can also reduce waste by:

- Implementing Offer versus Serve.
- Offering multiple choices within each component.
- Allowing an appropriate amount of time to eat and scheduling meal periods so they are not too close together.
- Implementing recess before lunch, so children can work up an even larger appetite.
- Reviewing production records to help forecast amounts to prepare and identify unpopular items.

USDA Allowable Redistribution Options

- Students may take additional helpings at no cost
- Items leftover may be re served and claimed for reimbursement at future meals
- Items leftover may be donated to non profit organizations, such as a food bank

Acceptable Foods:

- Unopened, pre-packaged, shelf stable items, such as granola bars, cereal packs, crackers, ketchup, and drinks.
- Wrapped fruit and vegetables and fruits with a thick skin, like bananas, oranges, and washed apples, if the peel is intact.
- Unopened, pre-packaged potentially hazardous or perishable food items, such as string cheese and milk, when a temperature control mechanism is in place.

Unacceptable Foods:

- Unpackaged food items, such as a salad bowl without a lid.
- Packaged items that have been opened, or otherwise compromised, such as an open bag of baby carrots.
- Packaged items that can be opened and resealed.
- Food items brought from home.

Requirements:

- A standard operating procedure for share table practices must be in the school's HACCP plan.
- Share table plans must be discussed with your health sanitarian.
- Staff must monitor the share table to ensure all items placed on it are allowable, the packaging is intact, untampered, and clean, and the expiration dates have not yet passed.
- Reused items must be properly stored and should be served first at the next meal service.
- Adults may not consume items left on the table.

Options for Potentially Hazardous foods:

If the item is immediately stored in a temperature controlled storage unit, such as a refrigerator or mechanical display cooler, and the temperature is maintained at 41°F or colder, it may be returned to storage and re-served at the next meal service.

If time is used as a public health control, students can share unopened items within 4 hours of service. Items must be discarded after 4 hours. If this option is utilized, a written policy outlining your procedures must be provided to your health sanitarian.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Locate the share table after the point of service and away from possible sources of contamination.
- Decide to allow food to be re-used only once. Mark returned foods for re-sale so that the food is sold only one more time before being discarded.
- Display signage outlining share table "rules".
- Invite students to be "share table helpers", teaching them about the importance of food safety and recycling.
- Provide families with information about share table guidelines.

THIS HANDOUT WAS MADE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH