

Food Waste

Overview

Take a look around your school lunchroom. Are students eating all or most of the food on their tray? How much food gets thrown out on a daily basis? The United States Department of Agriculture reports that in the United States, [food waste is estimated at between 30-40 percent of the food supply](#).

Because many schools serve multiple meals to students each day, schools are a great place to reduce, recover and recycle food waste.



Take Action

Schools have a unique opportunity to significantly minimize food waste by making a few simple changes on how food waste is handled. Take action with some of these strategies:

- Have a conversation with school nutrition and custodial staff to explore food waste at your school. What are the areas of concern and what are some ways to improve?
- Buy less! Is your school lunchroom purchasing or preparing too much?
- Recover wholesome food from school meals (such as whole fruits) and make them available for students using the guidance provided on [share tables](#).

- Allow students to keep a breakfast or lunch food item to eat later on in the day if allowable by administration.
- Compost leftovers to fertilize your school's garden or to donate to local farmers.
- [Schedule recess before lunch](#). Scheduling recess before lunch can reduce plate waste by as much as 30%.
- Increase the amount of [time that students have to eat lunch](#). Extending lunch periods from 20 to 30 minutes may reduce plate waste by nearly one-third. [See other reasons why this is important](#).
- Work with your custodial staff to have separate waste bins in your school lunchroom for recycling, food to be donated, compost and trash. Label the bins with photos to help students sort their waste.

Tips



Start a club focused on reducing food waste. Work with students to conduct food waste audits or to serve as monitors during lunch to make sure waste is being put in the correct bin.



Teach students about the issue of food waste in science or social studies lessons.



Ask a volunteer to lead and supervise an after-school club focused on food waste.



Utilize the support of volunteers to determine non-profit partners to work with to donate excess food and schedule deliveries.

Additional Resources

[Infographic - Reducing Food Waste: What Schools Can Do Today \(United](#)

[K-12 Schools Reducing, Recovering and Recycling Food Waste \(United States](#)

[States Department of Agriculture\)](#)

[Department of Agriculture\)](#)

[Join the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement
\(Smarter Lunchrooms Movement\)](#)

[Share Table Guidance \(Minnesota
Department of Education\)](#)

Help Your School Do a Waste Audit

[Guide to Conducting Student Food](#)

[Waste Audits \(United States Department
of Agriculture, Environmental Protection
Agency, University of Arkansas\)](#)

Related Activities

Child and Adult Care Food Program

Your after-school program may be able to apply for funding for after-school snacks or suppers.

Backpack Programs

Backpack food programs provide nutritious, non-perishable, easy-to-prepare food to children to ensure they get enough food on weekends and holidays to avoid hunger when they can't depend on school meals.

Farm to School

Farm to school is a national

Give Back by Wasting Less

At a time when 1 in 6 children are

movement that helps connect kids to healthy, local food while also supporting local farmers and building communities.

hungry, taking a few simple tips to reduce food waste will not only save money, but it can also give back to those individuals and families in need.