

Sharing Tables at School Fact Sheet

Food waste is a national problem and a concern for many schools. Schools can play a role in helping reduce this problem by setting up a Sharing Table – a station where students may place food or beverage items they choose not to eat. The items can be available for students to take additional helpings or utilized outside of the meal program (i.e. school nurse office, afterschool activities, etc.).

Best Practices

- Implementation of Offer vs. Serve is the best way to combat excess waste. Students must select at least 3 of the 5 components. Milk is not a required component.
- Offer multiple choices, especially fruits and vegetables. When given choices, students are more likely to find something that they will want to eat.
- Prepare food in ways that enhances their appeal (season for ultimate flavor, cook from scratch more often, serve food at proper temperatures, slice fruit vs. only whole fruit options).
- Ensure students have ample time to eat. Minimum of 15 minutes for breakfast and 20 minutes for lunch after they receive their meal.
- Complete a food waste assessment to determine which foods are most frequently wasted and adjust the menu accordingly.
- Review production records to help forecast amounts to prepare and document leftovers so overproduction is not prevalent.
- If local policies permit, allow students to save items for later consumption, such as whole fruit.



The Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Nutrition and Health, Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and Iowa State University Human Sciences Extension & Outreach collaborated on development of this Fact Sheet.

Questions? Contact schoolmeals@iowa.gov.



Procedure

- Inform students about the Sharing Table in a way that does not pressure students to donate.
- The Sharing Table must be monitored by a trained nutrition employee, teacher, school staff, or volunteer. If students are involved in the process, ensure supervision is in place.
- Items on table are only for students, not adults.
- Items must be placed on Sharing Table before the students leave the cafeteria.
- Identify a list of appropriate items for the Sharing Table and a list of inappropriate items.

Food Safety

- Ensure table is located away from potential sources of cross-contamination (i.e. tray return site).
- Only accept items from the school nutrition program; no foods from home can be contributed.
- Only accept items in their unopened and original containers.
- If a variance is granted by the Iowa Dept. of Inspections and Appeals, certain time temperature control items may be accepted with the use of appropriate cold holding equipment.
- The monitor inspects items to ensure packaging is intact and that the item has not been contaminated.
- Rewash donated whole fruit that has an edible peel before making available to students.
- Develop a Sharing Table Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the school's Food Safety HACCP Plan, sample located at <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsafety/haccp-school-foodservice>

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