



FOOD | NUTRITION | AGRICULTURE | HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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Hunger Free Texans FOOD RESCUE TOOL KIT A Guide for Schools



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INTRODUCTION

Food Waste is a national problem not only for food manufacturers, distributors, grocery stores and restaurants but also for public and charter schools. Students throw out unwanted food every day in schools across America. At the same time, there are also many students who are growing and still developing and remain hungry when they leave the cafeteria. In America, 40% of edible food winds up in landfills and never consumed yet at the other end of the spectrum the Texas food insecurity rate is 15.7% and as high as 25% in some counties. This tool kit will provide information on food rescue programming and how it can be an intervention strategy for food waste in schools.

BACKGROUND

Hunger Free Texans (HFT) is the largest educator of food access information in Texas. HFT also works as a leader and change agent at the macro level to address systemic issues and gaps in the food insecurity, food access, food waste, food safety, food education, community nutrition, community agriculture, and healthy communities' sectors.

There are a limited number of food rescue programs in Texas Schools. This may be due to a variety of factors such as a lack of awareness of the Good Samaritan law or school food service managers believe that the program regulations prohibit them from donating leftovers to organizations that feed the needy according to 1996 guidance from the USDA. In creating this tool kit, it was important to identify that most food rescue programs are created by school nutrition service staff and operated by school food service staff. In Texas, recent legislation has allowed non-school food service staff to assist and participate in the operation of a food rescue program.

This resource guide was developed by a core group of cross sector agencies and schools with experience in school nutrition and food waste. The goals of this guide are to:

1. Create awareness that food rescued from a school should be made available and re-distributed back to the students of that school to reduce hunger.
2. Encourage any school professional or parent of a student enrolled in a school to partner with their school district's school nutrition program (SNP) to determine what will work best on a school campus for their food rescue program.
3. Provide school professionals with information on the definition and prevalence of food waste in our communities.
4. Identify Texas legislation and regulations which may affect operation of a school food rescue program.
5. Highlight opportunities for educational instruction around stopping food waste.
6. Provide school professionals with general recommendations on starting or enhancing a food rescue program.

RECENT TEXAS LEGISLATION



Legislation Overview

On September 1, 2017 legislation was created due to a concern for **food waste** in public and charter schools. Texas Senate Bill 725 (Student Fairness in Feeding Act) was passed which related to the donation and distribution of food at schools. The act allows for food to be **rescued** and re-distributed on campus directly to hungry students or food pantry organizations. The act provides options in the types of food that can be donated and distributed.

KEY COMPONENTS of TEXAS LEGISLATION

- **School districts or open-enrolled charter schools may allow a campus to elect to donate food to a nonprofit organization.**
- **Food must be donated through an “official” of a nonprofit organization who is directly affiliated with the campus or student enrolled at the campus.**

- **Donate foods may be received, stored or distributed on campus.**
- **Types of food which may be donated on the campus.**
- **Foods can be distributed on the campus at any time.**
- **Campus employees may assist in preparing and distributing the food as volunteers of the nonprofit organization.**

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Food Waste- Food waste or food loss is food that is discarded or lost uneaten. A recent nonprofit report from ReFed found Americans waste an estimated 72 billion pounds of food every year-52 billion pounds of which is wasted by manufacturers, grocery stores, and restaurants. Meanwhile, 20 billion pounds of fruit and vegetables are thrown away or left in fields. According to Feeding America, all this amounts to \$218 billion worth of wasted food each year. But what about schools?

Sources of Food Waste in Schools:

- Food from the cafeteria serving line thrown away by students
- Surplus food prepared for breakfast, lunch, snack or dinner service
- Food brought from home thrown away by students

Food Rescue- Food Rescue is also known as food recovery or food salvage. It is the practice of gleaning edible foods that would otherwise go to waste from places such as restaurants, sporting events, festivals, dining facilities, meetings, galas, grocery stores and farmers markets then distributing it to a local food

pantry or food rescue program. Many rescued foods are hot & cold prepared meals that are often temperature sensitive. Food rescue is an intervention for food waste and a way to divert food that is still edible to those who are hungry.

Hunger- A feeling of discomfort or weakness caused by lack of food, coupled with the desire to eat. According to Bread for the World, people who suffer chronic hunger don't have the option of eating when they are hungry. They do not get enough calories, essential nutrients, or both. People who are hungry have an ongoing problem with getting food to eat.

There are two types of hungry students:

- Students who may be food insecure and don't know where their next meal may come from.
- Students who are not food insecure but are still developing and growing and may be hungry.

Food Share Table- A food share table is a place where students place unwanted, uneaten food items in the school cafeteria, so other students can select these food and beverage items at no cost during a mealtime. Different types of containers can be used to collect shareable items. Plastic tubs, wire baskets, ice chests, clear plastic tubs or other transparent containers are containers that can be used to collect unwanted food items. Transparent containers allow students to see what's available to choose.



School Pop-Up Pantries- Infrequent food distribution events on a school campus. Food for the pop-up pantry can come from a school food drive held during a school

related calendar event (Ex. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Sporting Event etc.). Food is meant for families of the school who may be in need. Food can be received on selected days (Ex. Monday-Thursday then re-distributed on Friday before the weekend or before a holiday). Pop-Up Pantries often do not require dedicated space and staff resources for a long period of time.

The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996- Legislation which extends protections against civil and criminal liability to persons or organizations that make food donations except in cases of gross negligence.

LEGISLATIVE CLARIFICATIONS

Key Components of SB 725:

- A. School districts or open-enrolled charter schools may allow a campus to elect to donate food to a nonprofit organization.**
 - A non-profit can be a church, foundation, pantry, food bank, other community based organization, ISD, even a PTA.
- B. Food must be donated through an "official" of a nonprofit organization who is directly affiliated with the campus or student enrolled at the campus.**
 - Officials of a nonprofit can include (Ex. A parent, teacher, social worker, counselor, nurse, custodian, or other campus staff).
 - Acceptable documentation for the "official of the nonprofit organization" can include (Ex. A letter from a nonprofit on nonprofits letter head stating that the person has volunteered with that agency and is in good standing).

Documentation can be turned into the campus administrator or designee.

C. Donated food may be received, stored, and distributed on the school campus.



- Identify a location where donated food will be collected and stored on campus (Ex. share table in cafeteria and refrigerator in the nurse's office).
- Follow all applicable local, state, and federal food safety regulations for handling and storing of donated foods.

D. Types of food which may be donated on the campus:

- Unopened, uneaten surplus food from the school cafeteria prepared for breakfast, lunch, snack, or dinner programs.
 - a. Packaged or unpackaged unserved food
 - b. Packaged served food if packaging is in good condition
 - c. Whole uncut produce
 - d. Wrapped raw produce
 - e. Unpeeled fruit
- Food drive donated food (shelf stable, nonperishable foods)

- Signage and student education can be helpful in identifying what types of foods can be donated and shared.



E. Foods can be distributed on the campus at any time.

- Ex. Students are allowed to take food items from a meal service with them to eat later as long as the food item can be carried by the student without a special container and if the item is food safe without refrigeration.
- Ex. Students who are unable to purchase a meal are allowed to get a sack lunch prepared by the food donation center from the nurse's office before the lunch meal service. Students eat their meal at lunch with other students.

F. Campus employees may assist in preparing and distributing the food as volunteers of the nonprofit organization directly affiliated with the campus.

- A food rescue program may consist of various campus staff. For those staff who are part of the School Nutrition Program there may be some gray areas to think about. School nutrition/food service staff should be mindful of not charging time to the School Nutrition Program (SNP) while performing "operational tasks" for a food donation program. Questions

from food service/school nutrition staff should be referred to your local Educational Service Center (ESC).

- The Responsibility Chain. Keep record of any additional volunteers involved in the receiving, storing, and redistributing of food items for your food rescue program for quality control and administrative purposes.

FOOD WASTE EDUCATION



It is important to define and educate about the issue of food waste to address the issue of food waste in our communities and schools more effectively and comprehensively.

- Combating food waste requires education on food waste. Food waste education can be implemented in school curricula; however, it is recommended for secondary schools (6-12) to ensure that children in primary schools (K-5) are not deterred from eating enough at meal time. When developing food waste education consider these modalities:
 - a. **Posters & Signage**-Signage can be helpful in complimenting your food rescue program and further developing your school's food

waste education. Signs can identify the types of foods that are allowable to share. Signs are also helpful in directing how foods should be collected and stored. Another helpful use of signage can be where schools develop campus wide competitions by creating food waste posters.

- b. **Power Points**-PowerPoints can be used as another component to your food waste and food rescue education strategy. Consider creating campus wide competitions for the best food waste or food rescue power point. Involve students in the development process and have the food service or nutrition services staff pick a winner. This will get buy-in from food service staff and encourage campus wide involvement.
- c. **Videos**-Consider developing a food waste or food rescue video that involves students in the development. Schools can select the classroom with the best video. The use of cameras and filming can be a fun activity for students and teachers and staff.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Texas school districts, from rural to urban counties, vary in size, staff, and resources. Similarly, school professionals also vary in their knowledge about food waste and available intervention methods. These recommendations are meant to provide a foundation or checklist of components and ideas to think about when starting or enhancing a food rescue program. In addition to this tool kit, we also encourage you to attend a supplemental food rescue workshop available in Houston which provides more in-depth information that is not available here.

1. **Campus Administrator Approval.** Before starting a food rescue program, always get approval from the campus administrator to ensure buy in and program success. This is usually the campus principal. The campus principal may appoint a "campus designee" as

the administrative point of contact. This could be the assistant principal or other campus staff.

- 2. School Nutrition Partnership.** Partner with your district's School Nutrition Program staff to determine what will work best on your campus.
- 3. Food Waste Committee.** Think about creating a food waste committee made of various campus staff. (Ex. Assistant principal, cafeteria manager, nurse, teacher, school SHAC Representative, custodian, official of a nonprofit organization). The food waste committee can provide some oversight and direction for your food rescue program. This will also ensure continuity and sustainability of the program should someone leave during the school year.
- 4. Health Department Input.** Local health department collaboration is also key to ensure success of a food rescue program. Before starting a food rescue program, think about setting up a meeting with your local health department official to get their feedback.
- 5. Food Rescue Coordinator.** Officials of a nonprofit organization can be a school's Food Rescue Program point of contact. Think about giving the "official of the nonprofit organization" a title of "Food Rescue Coordinator, Champion or Representative" which elevates the importance to their food rescue coordination duties/responsibilities.
- 6. Cross-Campus Collaboration.** The official of a nonprofit organization may work with various staff on a campus. These may include a school nurse, social worker, counselor, teacher, food service staff etc., who may help with various aspects of the food rescue program. (Ex. Nurse may help to identify food insecure students).
- 7. Program Location & Signage.** Location and signage is key to a successful food rescue program. Some schools place share tables in designated areas as students leave the serving area while others locate them in other areas of cafeteria. Adding a visual component is always helpful in explaining a process. Signage will help direct where certain types of donated/collected food items should go.
- 8. Include Students.** Consider including students in your food waste/food rescue program. This increases the likelihood of student buy-in and program success. Think about assigning names for roles student assume in your food waste program. An example of this can be calling students "Food Rescue Monitors" or other names you designate. Including students gives them a sense of purpose, responsibility, and empowers them to be future leaders.
- 9. Inform Your Campus.** Before starting a food rescue program, you may want to communicate what the program will be about and how the program will benefit the campus to students and campus staff. You can communicate this through your school's morning PA announcements, staff emails or employee staff meetings.
- 10. Food Safety Regulations & Standard Operating Procedures.** Follow all applicable local, state, and federal food safety regulations for handling and storing of donated foods. Creating standard operating procedures (SOP) may be helpful in outlining how food items are handled properly at the share tables or during redistribution and how and who will be monitoring the process. SOPs should be incorporated in the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point Plan (HACCP) by School Nutrition Program staff if leftovers are used.
- 11. Food Handling Requirements & Training.** Any person managing a food rescue program should be familiar with food handling requirements. Persons who do not have food handling experience may want to take an online ServSafe or similar food handler training course. These courses can be found online. Courses are typically 60-90 minutes in length and cost around \$15. There is typically an exam at the

end. Documentation that the course was taken can be sent to the campus administrator or designee. You can also contact your school nutrition program staff for more info.

12. Cold Food Items. It's important to keep temperature sensitive foods at the right temperature. Some food rescue programs place cold food items on ice or use ice chests. Consult with you school nutrition program staff for the best method.

13. Wash & Inspect Your Produce. Washing all produce that has been donated/collected is recommended before re-distributing. It is also good idea to inspect fruit for potential damage to the skins exterior such as cuts, punctures, or foreign material etc.

14. Monitoring, Logging Food Items & Tracking Outcomes. It is important that someone monitors what is being placed on a share table. Think about assigning staff or volunteers as monitors. This will also help ensure that only food from the serving line is being deposited on the table. In addition to monitoring, logging all items left on the share table or received from a food drive is good for quality control and administrative purposes. This may also be helpful in tracking a school's food waste reduction activities including poundage that was diverted from a landfill.

15. Food Allergy Concerns. Addressing food allergy concerns will require campus-based decision making. (Ex. Schools post signs and communicate to students and parents that items placed on the shared table may or may not be allergen free).

16. Food Distribution Methods:

- A. **Food Share Tables**-Tables that have multiple food items that are not eaten by students from the lunch service.
- B. **School Pantries**-a location within the school where donated shelf stable food items are made available to food

insecure students and their families to access directly from their school.

- C. **School Pop-Up Pantries**-Infrequent food distribution events on a school campus. Food for the pop-up pantry can come from a school food drive held during a school calendar event (Ex. Thanksgiving, Christmas, football game, wellness event etc.). Food is meant for students of the school who may be in need. (Ex. Food can be received Monday-Thursday then re-distributed on Friday before the weekend).
- D. **Backpack Survival Kits**-Backpacks are a good way to re-distribute food to hungry students or food insecure students especially before the weekend. Work with your school nurse, counselor, or social worker to pre-identify food insecure students.

17. Food Insecure Students. It is always important to try to maintain the confidentiality of food insecure students and their families when managing your food rescue program.

18. Food Waste Education. Include food waste education as part of your food rescue program

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