

HELPING SCHOOLS SAVE FOOD:

# Food Share Table



## A Step-by-Step Guide for Alameda County Schools

Food waste is a national problem with approximately 40% of edible food ending up in landfills and never reaching a plate, while many Americans lack reliable access to a sufficient amount of affordable, nutritious food. In Alameda County, hunger has increased even more than nationally. One out of five residents seeks help from the Alameda County Community Food Bank; two thirds of those in need are children and seniors.

Schools can play an influential role in helping solve this problem, for example, by setting up a food share table. By preventing edible food from going to waste at school, we set an example for our students and provide an opportunity to learn how everyday behaviors impact the environment and community.

*Thanks to the **Oakland Unified School District** for piloting the best practices shared in this guide, and to the **Alameda County Environmental Health Department** for providing valuable guidance.*



**OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
Community Schools, Thriving Students



# Food Share Table

A food share table in the school cafeteria allows students to give away their unwanted, still sealed or unbitten food items, so other students can select these food and beverage items at no cost during mealtime. Different types of containers can be used to collect shareable items. Wire baskets, clear plastic tubs or other transparent containers are best because they enable students to see what's available to choose.

## 1. Setup

The food share table is part of the school cafeteria's waste sorting station. Ideally, place it first in line, so that students can set aside food share items before they start to separate liquids, compostable items, recyclables and trash.

At schools that use a double row of waste bins, the food share station can be set up in the middle, next to where students stack their trays.

Do not to place the food share container directly on the floor, or on the same level as the liquid dump bucket, in order to avoid contamination and splashing of liquids.



## Signage

Make sure the food share basket, crate or bin is marked clearly with signage that reads "Food Share" and shows examples of acceptable items.



To download a printable food share table sign, as shown here, visit [www.stopwaste.org/food-share-sign](http://www.stopwaste.org/food-share-sign).

## Organization

If you expect a lot of food items to be shared, consider setting up separate areas for cold items such as milk and yogurt, hot prepared entrees such as pasta, and room temperature items like fruit.

Organizing shared foods in this way will:

- Control temperatures (see also food safety section),
- Help students select food, and
- Make cleanup and handling leftovers easier.

## 2. Instructing Students

Be thoughtful about introducing your students to the food share table, its purpose and rules. Helping students understand that they are expected to eat the food items they choose, will encourage them to select more carefully while in the serving line and set aside items they don't intend to eat for the food share table.



### Food Share Table Rules:

- Students place unwanted, sealed and unbitten items into the container.
- Students select items they intend to eat during the meal period.
- Items brought from home are not acceptable.



## 3. Monitoring the Food Share Table

Kitchen staff, with support from custodians and cafeteria monitors, will need to supervise the food share table—at a minimum in between each meal and at the end of the last meal service. If possible, check on the station periodically throughout the meal period.

While the food share table is helpful when students want items—such as milk or a piece of fruit—that they forgot to get or are no longer available, some students may use food share to fill up on items such as graham crackers rather than eating a balanced meal. Oversight by kitchen staff can help reduce this behavior.

## 4. Clean-up and Handling Leftovers

At the end of the meal service, kitchen staff brings all items from the food share table into the kitchen for sorting and cleaning. Acceptable food items may be served again and claimed for meal reimbursement by the USDA.

### ▪ Room temperature items

Items like packaged crackers and pieces of fruit are ready to serve again after cleaning.

### ▪ Individually packaged yogurt

Ready to serve again after cleaning.

### ▪ Hot or cold items

If these items have been outside the *Safe Temperature Zone*\* for less than two hours, they can be served again or donated if an approved food donation program exists at your school.

If the items have been outside the *Safe Temperature Zone*\* for more than two hours, they cannot be served again or donated. If your school has a composting program, remove any plastic wrapping from the items and place into the compost bin. If removing the packaging is not an option, discard the item as a last resort.

\* See food safety section on page 4.



# What about Food Safety?



The California Retail Food Code, Section 113996, requires that all *Potentially Hazardous Foods*—such as milk, meals containing meats or cooked vegetables, or certain cut fruits such as melons—must be maintained under proper food holding temperatures to prevent the potential for rapid bacterial growth. Once food items leave their hot or cold environment, they are considered outside the *Safe Temperature Zone (STZ)*.

Food collected for Food Share is allowed to be outside of the STZ no more than two hours. **Any food left out after two hours needs to be composted or discarded.** Fortunately, during a typical school meal period, food will be outside the safe temperatures for only a very

short period of time, e.g. while it leaves the serving line and moves to the food share table. Nevertheless, schools need to observe safe food handling procedures and customize their practices to meet food safety requirements.

Keeping cold items in the STZ can be challenging, especially on hot days. Consider methods to keep cold items chilled, e.g. by using refrigerators, chest freezers, ice tubs or ice sheets. You may want to consider taking cold item temperatures with a thermometer in between lunch services and discard any items close to 60°F.

	Safe temperature zone (STZ)	Allowable time outside the STZ	Ways to control temperature
Cold food* e.g. milk	41°F or lower	Up to 2 hours below or at 60°F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up a separate area for cold items on the food share table.</li> <li>Use ice buckets or ice sheets.</li> </ul>
Hot food e.g. pasta dish	135°F or higher	Up to 2 hours below 135°F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up a separate area for hot items on the food share table.</li> </ul>
Room-temp. food e.g. apple, crackers	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No temperature concern.</li> <li>Ready to serve again after cleaning.</li> </ul>

\* Exception: Individually packaged yogurts can be served again.

## More Information & Resources

### California Department of Education's Food Share Mandate

[www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbnsdsnp052008.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbnsdsnp052008.asp)

### USDA Guidance for Food Share in Child Nutrition Programs

[www.fns.usda.gov/use-share-tables-child-nutrition-programs](http://www.fns.usda.gov/use-share-tables-child-nutrition-programs)

### Food share table sign for download

[www.stopwaste.org/food-share-sign](http://www.stopwaste.org/food-share-sign)

## Questions?

For questions about setting up a food share table at your school, or if you'd like to customize this guide for your school district, contact:

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