

Guidance for Schools: Share Tables & Food Donation

The RI Department of Education, RI Department of Health, and U.S. Department of Agriculture support the recovery for donation of unopened commercially packaged food and whole fruits from school meals in Rhode Island.



This can be done through the use of “share tables”, stations where children may return wholesome and safe food or beverage items they choose not to eat. These food and beverage items are then available to other children who may want additional servings at no extra cost. The items may also be served and claimed for reimbursement during another meal service or donated to soup kitchens or local food pantries in Rhode Island.

How much recoverable food are we throwing away?

The amount of recoverable food varies from school to school depending on the ages of students and level of participation in school meal programs.

For Example:

POUNDS recovered in a school with 400 students:

- 9-20 lbs per day
- 44-88 lbs per week
- 1600-2800 lbs PER YEAR



44 pounds per week can equal:

**200 separate food items
OR
about 37 meals per week!!**



Where can we donate the recovered food?

Work with your partnering food rescue organization to determine what they can take and to create a schedule for pickup.

- Locate a partnering food pantry at FoodRecovery.org
- A list of agencies accepting food donations can be found at the RI Department of Health website <http://arcg.is/1nWPP4>

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What can be left on a “Share Table” or saved for donation?



Items Allowed

- Unopened commercially packaged items that must be stored at or below 41°F, such as bagged baby carrots, sliced apples, cartons of milk, yogurt, and cheese sticks
- Unopened commercially packaged items that do not need temperature control for safety, such as a bag of pretzels or granola bar
- Whole pieces of fruit with a peel, such as bananas or oranges
- Whole pieces of fruit with an edible peel, such as apples and pears, if wrapped or rewashed



Items NOT Allowed

- Food not provided by School Meal Programs (e.g., food brought from home)
- Perishable foods that have not been kept at 41°F or lower or that must be held hot
- Opened or unpackaged food items, such as:
 - An opened bag of baby carrots
 - A salad bowl without a lid
 - Whole fruit with an edible peel if not wrapped (place unwrapped fruit in a bin until they have been rewashed and thoroughly dried).
- Packaged items that can be opened and re-sealed.



Monitor the table to ensure that unallowable foods are not put on the share table and allowable foods are handled to prevent any potential contamination (ex: original packaging is unopened, etc.).

Ensure perishable foods, which require temperature control for safety, are stored at or below 41°F with an insulated bin, such as a cooler filled with ice or frozen gel packs. Monitor and record the temperature inside the cooler to verify that food is being maintained at safe temperatures.

Be familiar with safe food-handling practices. Practice good personal hygiene. Clean and sanitize food collection containers, as appropriate. For more information, see “Food Safety” in the resources below.

Display signage outlining share table “rules.”

Resources for additional information:

1. RI Department of Health - Food Safety: health.ri.gov/food-safety
2. RI laws protect you from liability when you donate food in good faith: webserver.rilegislature.gov/Statutes/TITLE21/21-34.1/21-34.1-3.htm
3. USDA guidance: The Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs: www.fns.usda.gov/cn/use-share-tables-child-nutrition-programs