

BUILDING A SHARE TABLE IN CENTRAL OHIO K-12 SCHOOLS



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INTRODUCTION

This guide has been developed to help your school and district implement sustainable share table programs. A share table program properly utilized by staff and students can provide hands-on lessons about food waste reduction and build communities through sharing.

WHAT IS A SHARE TABLE?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a 'Share Table' as carts and/or tables where students can place uneaten food and beverage items served by the school. These items are then available to any student, allowing students to receive more of the foods that they will eat and avoid wasting the foods that they will not.

WHY SHARE TABLES?

With as many as one million pounds of food entering the Franklin County landfill every day, local school leaders and members of the Central Ohio Food Waste Initiative, led by SWACO, are joining local, national and international efforts to cut food waste in half by 2030. Share tables are one of several ways that schools can be part of the solution.



OHIO SHARE TABLE BEST PRACTICE OVERVIEW

Please Note: Regulations around share tables can vary from district to district. School district administrators should be engaged prior to implementing a program in order to clarify local as well as state and federal policies regarding share tables. The guidelines below list materials that are acceptable and unacceptable for share tables in Ohio according to state regulation.

- **Work with Local Health Department:** Food service operations and retail food establishments are advised to contact their local health department to ensure their share table plans are in accordance with the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Health Code, the Ohio Department of Health Guidelines, and local health department interpretation.
- **Monitor:** Adults on duty must always monitor the share table and discard any foods found to be opened, tainted, or contaminated.
- **Packaged Items:** Items placed on share tables must have intact packaging, excluding fruits that require peeling such as oranges and bananas.
- **Temperature Controlled Foods:** Time/Temperature Controlled for Safety (TCS) foods are always to be kept at or below 41°F or discarded after three hours. These foods and drinks are not to be donated or redistributed after such time.
- **Donation:** Under Ohio Department of Health regulation, foods left on the share table at the end of the mealtime may be donated. This can include commercially pre-packaged TCS foods that have remained intact and held at 41°F or below, and commercially pre-packaged non-TCS foods that have remained intact in their packaging. Consult your local health department for further regulation regarding food donation.

MATERIALS NOT ACCEPTED FOR SHARE TABLES

- **Open Packages:** Packaging with damaged, opened, or otherwise compromised packaging cannot be shared.
- **Partially Eaten Foods:** No partially eaten foods can be shared.
- **Items from Home:** Items from home cannot be shared, including unopened packages and Items comparable to those served with school lunches (such as a chip bag from home that is made by the same manufacturer as the school-provided items).



5 STEPS TO STARTING A SHARE TABLE PROGRAM

STEP 1. KNOW THE RULES

There are federal, state and sometimes local regulation around how to operate a share table. Reach out to your school district to learn relevant policies for share tables in your school.

Here are several general guidelines from the Ohio Department of Agriculture and Ohio Department of Health:

-Packaging: All foods placed on the share table should have intact packaging, excluding fruits that require peeling such as oranges and bananas.

-Temperature Controls: Time/Temperature Controlled for Safety (TCS) foods placed on share tables should be held at or below 41°F. If refrigeration is not possible for these items, they cannot remain on the share table for more than 3 hours and must be discarded when the 3-hour period is over. TCS items that have been out for more than three hours without temperature control cannot be donated or served again.

-Donation and Reuse: Items left on a share table at the end of the meal service cannot be returned to the food service operator for resale or to be served again. However, the following items can be donated: commercially prepackaged items with intact packaging (TCS foods must have been kept at or below 41°F).

Reach out to district administrators for more information on additional regulations in your region as well as for clarification regarding state and federal policies.

STEP 2. BUILD YOUR IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

First, talk with district administrators in the local food service department to better understand existing policy around share tables and additional local regulations, if any.

Talk with lunchroom staff about what challenges they expect to face, how to address those concerns, and what food safety policy they will need to know to implement a program.

Ensure that lunchroom staff and supervisors have the support that they need to monitor share table activities. In some cases, parent volunteers and student green teams assist lunchroom staff with share table supervision. If donation is permissible in your school, determine an end-of-meal service plan for donating leftover share table foods.

STEP 3. SPEAK WITH STUDENTS

Gaining the awareness and enthusiasm of your students is essential for a successful program. Share the benefits of reducing food waste with students and share how share tables can help. These benefits include making additional free lunch items available to them, environmental conservation, and the opportunity to give back to their peers. Additional resources for communicating these benefits with your students, are available as part of SWACO's online classroom resources, which includes a slide show presentation, classroom activity, and a take home activity that teach the environmental, social, and economic value of food. Help to overcome any potential for stigma around taking food from the share table by emphasizing the environmental value of food and the goal of keeping food out of the landfill.



Be sure to have conversations with students about allergens on share tables and recommend that students with food allergies do not take food from the share table.

STEP 4. IMPLEMENTATION: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Designate a cart, table, basket, or other receptacle to be the share table. Include signage on or above the container at student eye-level to remind students what can and cannot be added to the share table. Download easy-to-use and customizable signage at www.swaco.org- or create your own.

Here are some common school-provided items that can go on a share table:

- Whole fruit with edible skin, wrapped (apples, plums, peaches, etc.)
- Whole fruit with peels (oranges, bananas, etc.)
- Unopened sandwich package
- Unopened vegetable serving*
- Unopened snack packages distributed by the lunch service (chips, pretzels, rolls, nuts, etc.)
- Unopened entrée*
- Unopened beverages*
- Unopened desserts*

*Note: Remember the requirements for temperature sensitive foods and either provide the appropriate temperature controls or enforce time restrictions on items placed on share table.

Necessary supplies:

- Signage to avoid confusion as to what can be placed on share tables
- Table, cart, basket, or shelf space that can be your designated share table

During the lunch period, carry baskets with share table foods around to where students are sitting as they may not take the time to go look, but will happily accept an item offered to them!

At the end of the meal service, follow guidelines for disposal of foods unfit for donation and follow your team's donation plan with all donatable items.

STEP 5. CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESS AND SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE!

Help to spread share table programs to other schools in your community! Did SWACO help you implement or enhance your share table program? Post about your success on social media and tag SWACO (@SWACOGreen on Twitter and @SWACO.org on Facebook). Share your program's story in your school district newsletter or local newspaper- SWACO representatives are available to provide a quote or comment for the article.



OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Speak to your local health department about donating foods that are left on the share table at the end of the lunch service. Regulations from Ohio Department of Health allow donation of non-TCS foods and TCS foods that have been held at proper temperatures.
- Share your successes with your district's board of education. This will forge a path for other schools to start share table programs of their own. SWACO representatives are available to join you to celebrate your success.
- It may be easier to start small and implement your program in phases. If implemented in phases, try offering the share table program during one lunch period to identify logistical and knowledge gaps before rolling the program out to the entire school.
- Press releases, newsletter articles, social media, videos and websites are great ways to share your commitment to recycling. Don't forget to consider tagging SWACO on social media.
- Have recess before lunch to further reduce food waste.
- Extend the lunch period from 20 to 30 minutes to allow students time to finish their meals.
- Have students offer feedback of the menu through surveys or by hand count to Inform future purchasing choices.