Table Sharing for Schools

What is a Shared Food Table?

The goal of a shared food table is to reduce food waste by providing a location for students to donate items that they choose not to consume. These items can then be picked up and eaten by other students at no cost, promoting the consumption of nutritious foods. Use these guidelines to help implement a shared food table in your school.

What’s Allowed at a Shared Food Table?

Unopened, prepackaged items that are not time-temperature controlled. Time-temperature controlled items are foods that are potentially hazardous by time and temperature restraints. For instance, unrefrigerated dairy products can become unsafe over time when left out. These products will not be allowed on the shared food table. Any items that are only safe if kept at certain temperatures (i.e. milk) will not be allowed.

What’s not Allowed at a Shared Food Table?

- Prepackaged items that have not been maintained (i.e. the package was opened or otherwise damaged)
- Items that are time-temperature controlled meaning they may only be left out at room temperature for a short period of time before becoming unsafe for consumption (milk)

The USDA’s Overview:

The USDA has proposed shared food tables as a creative method for reducing food waste in Child Nutrition Programs (National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program). In order for these programs to get commodity foods and cash reimbursement, the USDA requires each child to take certain food items (a grain, a milk, and a fruit or a vegetable). As a result, these items are sometimes left unopened or untouched by the children. The shared food table helps reduce the waste by allowing children to put unopened or whole foods on the table for another child to have. The tables further promote nutritious eating by allowing other children to consume more fruits, vegetables, or milk than the meal originally provided. While State agencies are encouraged to support this strategy, Child Nutrition Programs should discuss shared food table plans with them prior to implementation.
**Tips on Implementing a Food Share Table in Your School**

- Check with local agencies about health and food safety codes
- Find a location for the table that is easily accessible
- Determine which items will be allowed on the table
- Identify who will be in charge of monitoring the table
- Educate students and parents on the importance of the table

**What has New Hampshire Done?**

The Food Safety Department of the Department of Health and Human Services strictly uses the 2009 Food and Drug Administration Food Code to regulate establishments in New Hampshire. Section 3-306.14 states the guidelines on returned food and re-service of food. This section states that once the food is in the possession of the consumer it may not be reoffered to other consumers unless it is not potentially hazardous (i.e. time/temperature controlled) and protected by contamination by a closed container or package.

This means foods that are potentially hazardous by time and temperature restraints will not be allowed on the shared food table. Products that will be excluded might be dairy-based such as yogurt or milks, which can go bad or be compromised by the time another student chooses it on the table. Additionally, foods that have a natural packaging such as bananas or oranges will be accepted.

**Contact Us!**

NH Farm to School is a statewide program working to connect NH farms and schools. Farm to School connections enable schools to serve healthy, locally grown foods in their cafeterias, integrate farms, food and nutrition curriculum, and explore food and agriculture-based learning opportunities.

*For further information, please contact:*

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**Other schools across the nation have followed suit from San Diego County, CA to Illinois.**

**Here’s what Vermont implemented for their school system:**

Items allowed on the table include packaged products and fruits with thick skin. Temperature-controlled items are allowed on the table if they are placed in a cooler, refrigerator, or ice bath. Items must be placed on the table prior to the child sitting down and the table must be monitored at all times. Students are not allowed to add items from home to the table.