

FOOD RECOVERY

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), S.C. Department of Education, and the S.C. Department of Environmental Services (SCDES) encourage schools to prevent food waste through menu planning and the “offer versus serve” provision, which allows children to decline some food offered at breakfast or lunch. Schools are encouraged to manage any unwanted items from students via share tables or donation of excess prepared food to nonprofits. **Schools have donation liability protection under the federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act as well as South Carolina legislation.**

SHARE TABLES

Per USDA, share tables are carts/tables where students can place unwanted food and beverage items. These tables provide an opportunity for other students to take additional helpings of food or beverages at no cost to them.

WHAT FOODS ARE ALLOWED ON SHARE TABLES?

- **Non-temperature controlled, pre-packaged products** such as cereal packs, crackers, drinks, and food bars
- **Wrapped fruit and vegetables** as well as fruit with thick skin such as bananas and oranges
- **Temperature-controlled, pre-packaged products** (e.g., cheese, milk) are allowed but must be placed in a refrigerator, cooler, or ice bath.

THE BASICS

- **Students are allowed to place their unwanted food on the share table** or in the designated refrigerator or cooler during lunch.
- **A member of faculty or staff should serve as monitor and inspect items** to make sure they have not been contaminated (e.g., opened, partially consumed) and original packaging is in sound condition.
- **Establish clear guidelines with students and staff** for items that may or may not be shared.
- **Include a sign with clear instructions on the table/cart.**
- **Follow all federal and state food safety requirements.**
- **Carefully plan, promote, and train staff.**

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FOOD DONATION

WHAT CAN BE DONATED?

- **According to USDA**, if prepared food exceeds the amount needed for the reimbursable meal service, a school may donate it to a nonprofit organization as long as state and local health standards are met.
- **All potentially donated food should be stored separately** in a container with a label of "Food for Donation" and the date.

THE BASICS

- **Carefully plan.** Develop a system to recover, label, and store food for donation.
- **Promote the plan and train appropriate staff.**
- **Meet with local nonprofit organizations** to clarify the best methods for food recovery.
- **Determine how the food will arrive at the charitable organization.** Will volunteers pick it up? Set up the time and day that works best for cafeteria and nonprofit staff.
- **Follow all federal and state food safety requirements.**

Visit des.sc.gov/dwfsc for more information on share tables and school donation.



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