

Given the fluctuation in the number of students served and student preferences and appetites, it can be challenging to purchase for, plan, and produce just the right amount of food for a school on any given day. This variability can result in a lot of wasted edible food. Fortunately, there are several easy strategies to prevent excess food, recover unwanted unopened food, and recycle food scraps.

As with any other food facility, school kitchens should start with preventing food loss first.

1. **WEIGH AND TRACK YOUR SURPLUS FOOD** by conducting a student waste audit, set a surplus food reduction goal, and plan accordingly! Visit the EPA Food Recovery Challenge page to sign up for a free tracking tool Here are a few tips for preventing food loss
  - a. Compare purchasing inventory with student preferences
  - b. Examine production and handling techniques to prevent and reduce preparation waste
  - c. Ensure proper storage techniques
  - d. See more prevention tips from the EPA and USDA below



[https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-08/documents/food\\_loss\\_prevention\\_options\\_grade\\_schools\\_august\\_2016.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-08/documents/food_loss_prevention_options_grade_schools_august_2016.pdf)



[https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/resources/K12\\_schools.html](https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/resources/K12_schools.html)



[https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/Student\\_Food\\_Waste\\_Audit\\_FINAL\\_4-6-2017.pdf](https://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/Student_Food_Waste_Audit_FINAL_4-6-2017.pdf)

2. **FEED STUDENTS AND DONATE SURPLUS FOOD** if there is still excess wholesome food after implementing prevention strategies.

### SHARE TABLES

Schools are unique in that there is the opportunity to set-up a share tables. *A share table is a table in the student common eating area where students can leave their unwanted, unbitten, unopened food and beverage items for other students to take if they would like more food than what was provided.* Share tables can help reduce wasted food and provide students with additional food options.

See this great resource created by Stop Waste on Best Practices for Share Tables.



[www.recyclingrulesac.org/docs/Schools\\_FoodShareTable\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.recyclingrulesac.org/docs/Schools_FoodShareTable_Guide.pdf)

**REMEMBER, DONORS ARE PROTECTED FROM LIABILITY** by the Federal Good Samaritan Law when donating surplus food to a nonprofit charitable organization.

Contact your health inspectors at Environmental Health Services if you have any questions about share tables, school food donation, and surplus food donation.

San Mateo County Environmental Health Services  
2000 Alameda de las Pulgas, Suite #100, San Mateo, CA 94403  
(650) 372-6200

3. **FEED ANIMALS** if after setting up a share table and donating surplus food the school kitchen is still generating food scraps. This strategy can benefit the school by reducing disposal costs and benefit the farmer by reducing feed costs. If you want to donate your food scraps to animals;
  - a. Contact your local solid waste, county agricultural extension office or public health agency for more information amount local regulations
  - b. Determine what types, how often, and the amount of food scraps you can provide
  - c. Connect and partner with a local farmer or rancher



<https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/reduce-wasted-food-feeding-animals>

4. **COMPOST FOOD SCRAPS** from the school kitchen if there are no animals to feed nearby. Compost onsite to support an interactive educational program or school garden OR send to a composter to divert food scraps from the landfill. Composting organic waste onsite can be a great learning opportunity for students, teachers, and staff. Find out more about composting onsite from the resources below.



<http://www.lifelab.org/composting/school-composting/>



<http://www.stopwaste.org/preventing-waste/composting-onsite>



<http://www.findacomposter.com/>