

School Food Sharing Table and Food Pantry Donation Pilot, 2015-Present

School: Amity Elementary, 4320 E. Galbraith Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236

School Grades/Population: Grades 3 through 6, 425 Students, 48.32% in Free and Reduced Lunch Program

Food Pantry: The Caring Place, 6312 Kennedy Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45213

Key Benefits

- Sharing and/or donating 5,500 items in one year
- Feeding hungry students and residents of the community
- Reducing waste going to landfill
- Teaching students that food is valuable and should not be wasted

Sharing Table

This program's principal focus is on feeding hungry students. Students with unopened, prepackaged food and/or whole fruit they do not want to eat place the items on a "sharing table" for other students to eat. This table lies outside of the cafeteria line and is monitored by lunch room proctors. To get an average of foods shared and foods donated, items were tracked every day for a week. On average, there were 27 items placed on the sharing table each day. Of those 27, 54% were eaten by hungry students, while 46% were donated. Items left on the table during the survey week consisted of milk cartons, yogurt, fruit cups, cheese sticks, OJ cups, apple juice cups, and granola bars.



These photos were taken within 15 minutes of each other, showing that students constantly add and take away items from the sharing table.

Food Pantry Donation

At the end of the lunch period, anything left on the sharing table is placed in a labeled box in the school's refrigerator. Kitchen staff also place any food getting close to "expiring" into the labeled box. Every Thursday, a volunteer takes the box to The Caring Place food pantry.

On average the program donates 50 to 75 items weekly to The Caring Place. The Caring Place is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On average 45 to 50 people visit The Caring Place each Tuesday and Thursday for assistance. The Director of The Caring Place has expressed that clients very much appreciate and need the food donated from Amity Elementary.



Conclusion

The Amity Elementary Food Sharing and Donation program has been very successful. Throughout the course of one school year, Amity rescued more than 5,500 items that might have otherwise ended up in the garbage had it not been for the food sharing table. The sharing table element requires little infrastructure or staff time, simply a designated table and informing students how it works. The donation element requires a designated space to refrigerate the items and a volunteer to transport. The District has created safety guidelines and best practices based on input from all health departments within Hamilton County (see Attachment A).

Reduce School Food Waste and Donate Surplus Food

Why is this important?

- Approximately 40% of food grown in the U.S. for Americans goes uneaten.
- Growing food requires many resources (e.g., fresh water, fertilizers, and fossil fuels) that we waste when food goes uneaten.
- One in five U.S. children today lives below the poverty line.
- When you reduce food waste and donate food you are following the EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy.

Source Reduction Ideas:

- Take a close look at the food that students do not eat and adjust what you offer based on waste.
- Consider setting up an "Offer versus Serve" cafeteria, permitting students to choose the foods they want to eat. It is already mandatory for high schools, but still optional for elementary and middle schools:
www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SP57-2014a.pdf
- Have recess before lunch to eliminate students' desire to rush through lunch for more recess time. Playing stimulates students' appetites and thirst, encouraging them to consume instead of waste food.
- Allow time before lunch for students to review menu and decide what they want to select.
- Create an appealing menu by giving food fun names (e.g., use superhero or cartoon character names appropriate for the age group).
- If unable to have recess before lunch, allow students to take food onto the playground after lunch.

Feed Hungry People:

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) under the USDA encourages schools to donate leftover or excess food, even from federally-funded programs.

"On November 18, 2011, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. 112-55) amended the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) by adding paragraph (l), the Food Donation Program at the end of Section 9. The amendment provides clear statutory authority for current Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) food recovery and donation policy in use by schools and institutions participating in the Child Nutrition Programs, the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)".¹



¹ Cynthia Long, "Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs", United States Department of Agriculture, February 3, 2012.

Food Donation Guidelines

The following guidelines have been developed with input from all of the health departments in Hamilton County, Ohio, and the Ohio Department of Health. If the school is not in Hamilton County, Ohio, check with the local health department before using the following advice.

Unopened, pre-packaged food (e.g., beverages like milk and juice, string cheese, yogurt, fruit cups, applesauce cups, pudding, chips/junk food bags, granola bars, carrots)

- Must be within expiration dates.
- Food and beverages requiring refrigeration must not stay unrefrigerated for more than 2 hours total; that includes the time it was out during the students' lunch period plus the time it takes to transport the food/beverage to the food pantry. At all other times it needs to be refrigerated at 41 degrees or below.
- Use caution and refrigerate items as soon as possible. If there is any question that it could have been unrefrigerated for more than 2 hours, discard.
- Consider having a cooler with cold packs for students to place items that need refrigeration in until moved to an actual refrigerator (optional).
- Opened food is not eligible for donation.

Whole fruits (e.g., oranges, bananas, apples, pears, peaches, plums)

- Fruit must be whole and intact (i.e., not bitten, cut, or peeled).
- No open bowls or cut up fruit that was served to a student but not eaten.

Excess prepared food that was not served

- Prepared and cut food needs to be protected in containers or by sneeze guards while on serving line to be donated.
- Hot food must be cooled down to 70 degrees within 2 hours and then down to 41 degrees within 4 hours. We recommend keeping a "[cooling log](#)."
- Prepared food must be stored in properly cleaned and sanitized food-safe container and labeled as to the contents (if different than what was in the container originally).
- Label container with the date it was prepared.
- Food needs to be consumed within 7 days of prepared date; do not donate if it is too old. The day of preparation must be counted as day one. Freezing may extend the time that food is safe for consumption, but all time before freezing and after thawing should not exceed 7 days.
- Do not donate variance foods, like sushi made with raw fish, undercooked food, reduced oxygen packaged, smoked meat, and in-house homemade yogurt.

Develop a system to ensure food safety

- Designate a place to refrigerate food. Refrigerator must be kept at 41 degrees or below. The refrigerator should contain an ambient air thermometer to verify temperature. Position refrigerator in an area not easily accessible by the public.
- Teach students to place their uneaten food (as described above) in a designated spot such as a specific table or on a cart that stops by each table towards the end of the lunch period. Consider putting food requiring refrigeration in a cooler.
- Allow hungry students to eat and drink from "the sharing table" during their lunch period.
- The sharing table should be monitored by school staff and any foods that has been opened, punctured, contaminated, or adulterated in any way should be discarded.
- Designate someone (student, parent volunteer, cafeteria worker, janitor, etc.) to move uneaten food to the refrigerator after each lunch period or at regular intervals to ensure food is not left out beyond the 2-hour time limit.
- Consider using coolers and cold packs when transporting refrigerated items to food pantry.

- Find *at least* two non-profit food banks, soup kitchens, or homeless shelters that want the food to ensure you have a backup at all times. Alternatively, set up a non-profit charity at the school allowing families to discreetly pick up items.
- Designate an individual or have a sign-up for volunteers (PTO members, food bank receiving donations, etc.) to drive the donated food to the non-profit, **at least** once a week.

Suggestions on finding a refrigerator

- Ask kitchen staff if they can designate and clearly label an area of a refrigerator just for food donations (ensuring it is kept separate from the food they serve).
- Use a separate commercial refrigerator in the building.
- Look for a donated commercial refrigerator. A few ideas to try to get a refrigerator donated include: offer a local store promotion if they donate; look to your school's families or PTA for a donation; contact Food Bus <http://foodbus.org/> (also a great source of information on how to implement and sustain your program).

Resources

The following resources provide you easy access to other detailed guidance documents and regulatory links:

Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act: www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-104publ210/pdf/PLAW-104publ210.pdf Protects donors and non-profit food distributors from liability if food is donated/distributed in good faith.

Food Bus: <http://foodbus.org/> Provides technical assistance, matches schools with local food pantries, provides materials (refrigerator, baskets, carts, etc.), educates and trains students and food recovery coordinators, takes on responsibility of legal issues schools are concerned about, etc.

Food Rescue: www.foodrescue.net/ Provides logistical technical assistance, advocacy, and education.

USDA Food Donation Guidance Document: www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/FNS_Guidance.pdf (copy and paste this into your browser) Describes USDA's clear statutory authority on donating food provided through their food and nutrition programs.

USDA Recovery/Donation Webpage: www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/resources/donations.htm Offers resources, encouragement, and guidance to recover food.

USEPA Food Recovery Challenge: www2.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-recovery-challenge-frc Any business or organization can join the FRC as a participant or endorser. They help you measure your wasted food, set goals, donate surplus food, and track results.

Ohio Department of Health's Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code: www.odh.ohio.gov/rules/final/3717-1.aspx Regulation on food safety requirements in the state of Ohio.

This document was produced by Hamilton County Recycling and Solid Waste District. If you have any questions, or would like assistance to set up a school food waste reduction program, contact Cher Mohring at Cher.Mohring@Hamilton-Co.org or 513-946-7737.