



United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service

# What You Can Do To Help Prevent Wasted Food

In the United States, over **one-third** of all available food goes uneaten through loss or waste. While the amount of food wasted at schools has not increased during recent years, there are many ways that everyone on a school campus can help reduce, recover, and recycle food before it goes to waste.

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**INSIDE: TIPS FOR SCHOOL STAFF,  
PARENTS, AND STUDENTS.**

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<https://TeamNutrition.USDA.gov>



# Tips for School Nutrition Professionals

## **Buy what you need.**

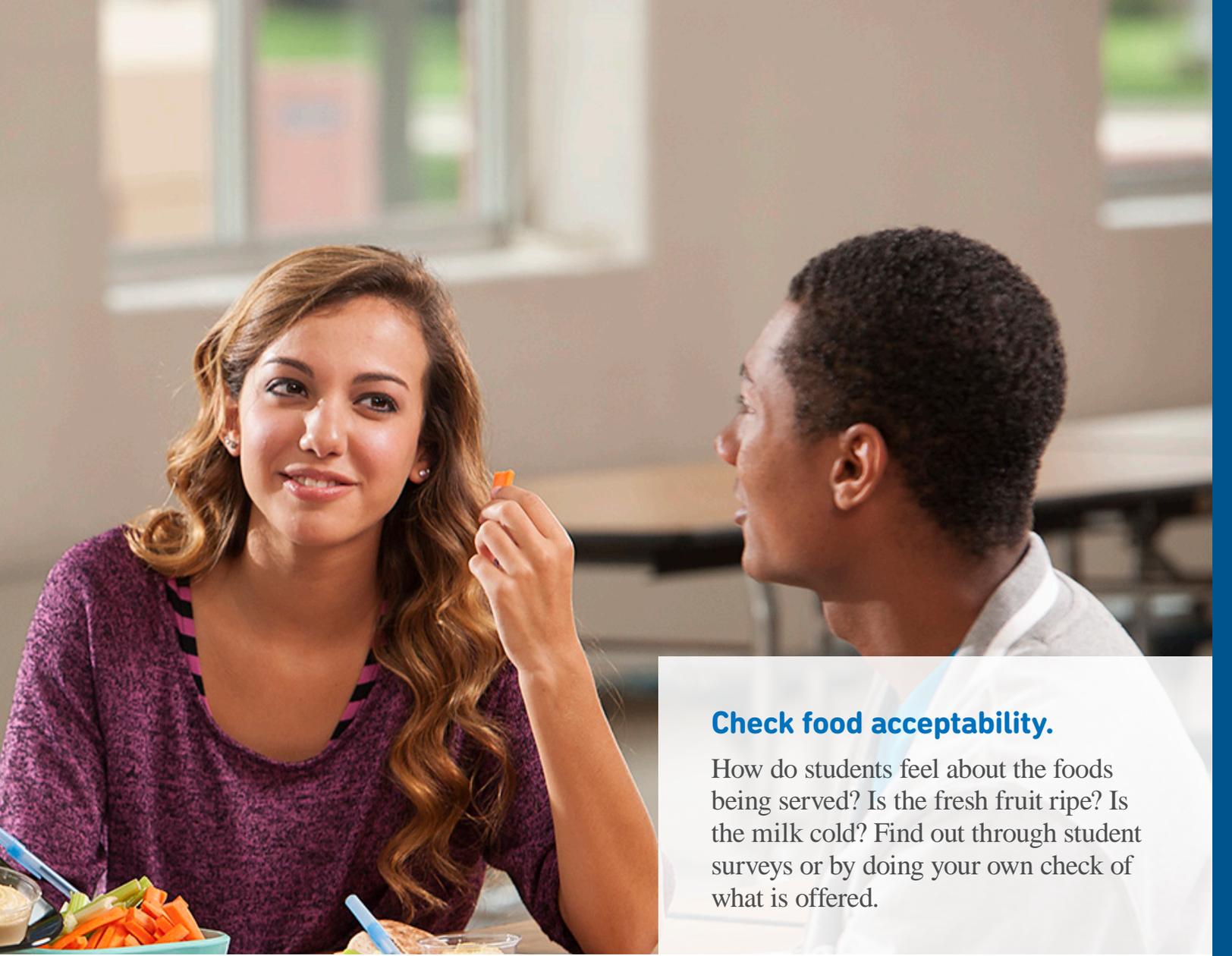
Use production records and our Food Buying Guide (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs>) to help you reduce leftover food.

## **Consider food sharing.**

Partner with your local health department to implement safe practices that encourage kids to leave unwanted food on “share tables.”

## **Market your meals.**

Highlight new foods on your menus and serving lines. Consider holding taste tests and recipe competitions or creating a student advisory committee to provide feedback on food acceptability and recipe names. Check out the Team Nutrition Popular Events Booklet for resources: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/popular-events-idea-booklet>.



### **Check food acceptability.**

How do students feel about the foods being served? Is the fresh fruit ripe? Is the milk cold? Find out through student surveys or by doing your own check of what is offered.

### **Give kids a choice.**

Participate in the “Offer Versus Serve” option, which allows students to decline some of the food offered in a reimbursable lunch or breakfast. Offering a greater variety of entrées (4 to 5 choices) is also associated with less waste than offering fewer choices.

### **Reduce fruit and vegetable waste.**

Whole fruit is more likely to be thrown away. Orange slices and apple quarters are easier and faster for kids to eat. Offering raw vegetables everyday is also associated with less waste. Consider a salad or produce bar to give children more choices among a variety of fruits and veggies.

### **Serve “Grab & Go Meals.”**

Offer a grab-and-go line for kids who want to get through the line faster so they have more time to eat. Use serving utensils that help kids take reasonable portions.



## Tips for Teachers

### **Do a class project.**

Investigate food waste with your class and ways to reduce it. Consider a composting project. Check out these resources from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: [www.epa.gov/students](http://www.epa.gov/students).

### **Learn about food.**

Providing nutrition education activities in a classroom or food service area is associated with significantly lower levels of plate waste at school meals. Get free class materials from Team Nutrition at: <https://TeamNutrition.USDA.gov>.

### **Visit local food producers.**

Take a trip to a farm, garden, or farmers market and learn about gleaning, the act of collecting excess fresh foods in order to provide it to those in need. Find more information at: <https://usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/resources/donations.htm>.

### **Learn about “share tables.”**

Talk to your school nutrition staff about creating a location where students can place unopened foods they choose not to eat.



## Tips for Administrators

### **Schedule recess before lunch.**

It can reduce plate waste by as much as 30 percent.

### **Offer lunch later.**

Research shows that there is less food waste when lunch periods start at 12:00 pm or later than when lunch starts before 11:30 am.

### **Give kids time to eat.**

Twenty-one percent of students report not having enough time to eat at least sometimes. Observe meal periods to see if lines are too long or the time provided for eating is too short.

### **Donate safe food.**

Partner with your health department and local hunger relief organizations to donate safe and wholesome food. See the USDA memo on food donation at:

[https://fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP11\\_CACFP05\\_SFSP07-2012os.pdf](https://fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP11_CACFP05_SFSP07-2012os.pdf)

# Raising Healthy Eaters.

Kids need foods from all of the five MyPlate food groups to learn, grow, play, and stay healthy. But, it can be discouraging when children do not eat the healthful foods offered to them. Keep these tips in mind for foods offered at home or at school.



- **Encourage sensible portions.**  
Teach kids to take smaller amounts and then go back for seconds if they are still hungry. Don't ask children to eat everything on their plate. This can teach kids to overeat even when their body feels full.
- **New foods take time.**  
Sometimes children do not take to new foods right away. If children reject a food, try preparing it a different way instead of removing it from the menu altogether. Nutrition education and promotion can also help encourage children to try new foods.



## Tips for Parents

### Have a try day at home.

If your school offers a food your child has not eaten before, consider making it and trying it at home together.

### Take action at school.

If you are able, volunteer at your child's school cafeteria and help younger children open milk cartons, yogurt, and other food packages.

### Make room for healthful meals.

Encourage your school's parent organization to choose fundraisers that do not involve the sale of food during the school day. Work with teachers to schedule celebrations involving food later in the day. This way, kids will not be too full to eat healthful meals at lunch and breakfast.

### Reduce food waste at home.

Wondering what to make with leftover ingredients? Find kid-approved recipes at:  
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/nutrition-recipes>.



## Tips for Students

### **Sign up, join in.**

Be part of surveys, taste tests, and advisory groups that help your cafeteria decide what goes on the school menu.

### **Take it with you.**

If your school offers whole fruit and you don't have time to eat it, take it with you if your school allows it. Enjoy the fruit later as a snack.

### **Look around.**

If food is being wasted at your school, home, or in your community, work with teachers and a student club or student leadership group to come up with ways to reduce, reuse, or recycle food.

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