

Important Note: This activity was developed for the original Green Lunchroom Challenge program, a voluntary pledge program for K-12 schools to improve the sustainability of their food service



operations. The project was coordinated by the [Illinois Sustainable Technology Center Technical Assistance Program](#) with funding from US EPA Region 5.

The following page(s) represent the content of this activity as it appeared on the original project web site, complete with available points and instructions for submitting documentation. **The project is no longer funded and as of June 2018 schools may no longer submit activity documentation to earn points and recognition as described.** The activity is presented for your information to guide your organization's sustainability efforts.

If your school or district implements the suggested activity and wishes to share its experiences, please email [Joy Scrogum](#). Your story may be incorporated into a blog post on this web site, the main ISTC site, or shared on social media to foster networking and inspiration among peer institutions.

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Establish a "sharing table" or similar system in the lunchroom where students can deposit uneaten/unwanted food for others to take if they wish

Activity Category: Diverting Food for Human Consumption

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Rationale: After source reduction, diverting food from the landfill in order to feed people is the second most desirable category of actions on the US EPA's Food Recovery Hierarchy. A "sharing table" is a system in which uneaten unopened packaged foods or beverages, or unpeeled fruits, may be placed by students that do not want them, for consumption by other children. Providing nutrition for the students at your facility is the primary mission of your food service program, so sharing tables are a great way to fulfill that mission while also diverting food from the landfill. These systems are allowed the Illinois Food Service Sanitation Code (77 Ill. Adm. Code 750) under certain conditions (see ISBE Outlook Newsletter, April 2013 in the "Resources" section below).



Photo by John Luke, NWI Times,
http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/porter/share-table-program-saving-food-at-portage-township-schools/article_6765ed06-b0b7-55c8-8ad6-670e1d2d7a6f.html

Activity Description: Set up a "sharing table" at your school (or at a minimum of one school in your district as a pilot, if you are participating as a district) after signing up for the Challenge. Note that this need not be literally "table"-you could use a cart, a portion of one of the tables in your lunchroom, a bin for collection of unopened milk cartons, or some other system which makes sense within the context of your space. Note that regardless of its exact form, your "sharing table" must be supervised by a food service staff member to ensure that packaged food remains unopened, food is not contaminated, etc. (Note also that if you establish a "sharing table", a logical extension of that effort would be to take any items collected but not

eaten during a meal service period to a local food bank or similar charity for donation. There are separate Challenge activities related to establishing a food donation policy and tracking the amount of food donated. See the list of other activities in the "Diverting Food for Human Consumption" category on the [main "Activities" page](#).) Please take possible food allergies into consideration; you may wish to post signs around your sharing area warning students with food allergies to avoid taking items from the sharing table, have the staff monitoring the sharing table be made aware of which students have food allergies, send home letters to parents asking those with children with food allergies to discuss avoidance of the sharing table with their children, or some similar strategy to protect students from accidental exposures.

Earn Challenge Points (100 points): Submit a 2-4 page report in Word or PDF format describing your "sharing table". Include at least one picture of the sharing table in use. Describe how staff monitor the sharing table, and any precautions in place to protect children with food allergies (include a photo of any warning signage used). Include observations/impressions of the success of this effort in reducing food waste. Also note what is done with collected items which are not taken by other students (e.g. are these items thrown out, donated, saved for after school-program snacks, etc.). Email your report to Joy Scrogum at jscrogum@illinois.edu.

Resources:

-  [US EPA Food Recovery Hierarchy](#)
-  [USDA: What to Do with Leftover Meals](#)
-  [ISBE Outlook Newsletter, April 2013](#) (see "Sharing Tables" at Schools article)
-  [ISBE Federal and State Regulations](#) (see section on Leftover Foods for mention of sharing tables)
-  [Share table program saving food at Portage Township Schools](#)
-  ["Sharing Table" now used in dozens of schools across Palm Beach County](#)
-  [Vermont: Food Sharing Tables--Guidance for Schools](#)

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