

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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Replace single use plates with reusable plates

Activity Category: Zero Waste Lunchrooms

Activity: Replace single use plates with reusable plates

Rationale: Disposable plates and utensils contribute to a large portion of waste stream in most lunchrooms. Single use cutlery and tableware also serves as a recurring cost for food service operations. Switching to, or in most cases back to, reusable plates, reduces the waste stream from avoidable disposables but also the cost of continuously purchasing disposable plates. Although the initial investment in transitioning to reusable plates maybe be significant, according to a recent study conducted in Minnesota at two middle schools, the switch reduced the annual per student cost for food-ware by 30% or a \$23,000 saving over three years of use. Also, consider the fact that disposable items in the lunchroom help create an atmosphere where materials, including the food served, are perceived by students as having less value. In such an atmosphere, waste seems more acceptable. The switch to reusable service ware can send a subtle message that the food offered on the plate is itself a valuable resource.



Activity Description: Work with your school/district administrator to switch from single use to reusable plates. **Note that this activity is only for schools or districts that are using disposable service ware at the time they sign up for the Challenge.**

Earn Challenge Points (200 points): Submit a 1-2 page Word or PDF file including:

- ✘ A picture of the purchased reusable plates and a picture of students using the reusable plates during the Challenge period
- ✘ The date on which the new reusable items began to be used
- ✘ Any observations or evidence you have that the switch has had an impact on waste and student behavior

Send your document to Joy Scrogum at jscrogum@illinois.edu.

Resources:

- ✘ [The Cost and Environmental Benefits of using reusable food ware in schools](#)

-  [Reusable Food Serviceware Guide](#)
-  [Reusable vs Disposables in Foodservice operations](#)
-  [Life Cycle Environmental and Cost Analysis of Disposable and Reusable Wares in School Cafeterias, Including Dishwasher Operation](#)
-  [Town of Framingham School Organics Diversion & Reusable Tray Program](#)
-  [Rethinking School Lunch](#) (see section on the dining experience)
-  [Toxic Chemical in Disposable Food Service Ware, CEH/RPN Webinar, November 16, 2017 \(PDF of slides\)](#)

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