

# Sharing Tables Fact Sheet

Food waste is a national problem and a concern for many child nutrition programs. You can play a role in helping reduce this problem by setting up a Sharing Table – a station where children may place food or beverage items they choose not to eat. The items can be available for children to take as additional helpings or utilized outside of the meal program (i.e. school nurse office, afterschool activities, and backpack programs).

## Best Practices

- Implementation of Offer vs. Serve is the best way to combat excess waste. Children must select at least 3 of the 5 components. Milk is not a required component.
- Offer multiple choices, especially fruits and vegetables. When given choices, students are more likely to find something that they will want to eat.
- Prepare food in ways that enhances their appeal (season for ultimate flavor, cook from scratch more often, serve food at proper temperatures, slice fruit vs. only whole fruit options).
- Ensure students have ample time to eat. Minimum of 15 minutes for breakfast and 20 minutes for lunch after they receive their meal.
- Complete a food waste assessment to determine which foods are most frequently wasted and adjust the menu accordingly.
- Review production records to help forecast amounts to prepare and document leftovers so overproduction is not prevalent.
- If local policies permit, allow students to save items for later consumption, such as whole fruit.



The North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Public Instruction supports the use of sharing tables to reduce food and beverage waste.

Request approval from the state or local regulatory authority before planning and implementing a sharing table program.

Call the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services Food and Lodging Unit at 701-328-1291 or email [foodandlodging@nd.gov](mailto:foodandlodging@nd.gov), or call your local public health unit.



## Sharing Table Procedure

- Inform children about the Sharing Table in a way that does not pressure anyone to donate.
- The Sharing Table must be monitored by a trained staff member designated to monitor the program during service times.
- Items on table are only for children, not adults.
- Children should place unwanted items on the Sharing Table before sitting down to eat to prevent any potential contamination.
- Post a list of appropriate items (wrapped or packaged food items, cartons of milk held under proper refrigeration) for the Sharing Table and a list of inappropriate items (unwrapped food items that require time and temperature control for safety).
- Monitor and keep records on wrapped or packaged temperature-controlled items saved for one-time re-service the next day.

## Sharing Table Food Safety

- Ensure table is located away from potential sources of cross-contamination (i.e. tray return site).
- Only accept items from your nutrition program; no foods from home can be contributed.
- Only accept items in their unopened and original containers.
- The monitor inspects items to ensure packaging is intact and that the item has not been contaminated.
- Rewash donated whole fruit that has an edible peel before making it available again.
- Programs must indicate in the Sharing Table plan how items brought to the Sharing Table will be discarded following each meal service, of which shall not exceed a one-hour time limit, if not consumed.
- Develop a Sharing Table Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for your Food Safety HACCP Plan.