



Sharing Tables: Updated Guidance for North Carolina Schools

August 4, 2025

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DISCLAIMER:

Photos that appear in this presentation are not necessarily examples of sharing table best practices.

Purpose, Challenges, and Risks



Photo credit: Katrina Perry



What is a Sharing Table?

Photo credit: Cathie Masters

Reasons for Using Sharing Tables



- Reduce food waste
- Meet additional food needs of students
(at no cost)

Photo credit: <https://civileats.com/2020/01/16/a-new-bill-aims-to-fix-food-waste-in-schools/>

Challenges and Risks

Monitoring
and oversight

Time and
temperature
abuse

Cross
contamination/
cross contact

Adulteration

Food waste
(items not
taken)

Pressure to
share



Regulations and Guidance

Photo credit: Katrina Perry

USDA Guidance: SP 41-2016, CACFP 13-2016, SFSP 15-2016, “The Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs” (June 22, 2016)

- Supports increasing consumption of nutritious foods and minimizing food waste in CN Programs
- Suggestions and resources for other strategies for reducing food waste

USDA Guidance: SP 41-2016, CACFP 13-2016, SFSP 15-2016 (continued)



Photo credit: Victoria Homick

- How sharing tables can be utilized:
 - Based on CN Program's preference
 - Additional helping at no cost
 - Served/claimed at another meal
 - Donated to non-profit

USDA Guidance: SP 41-2016, CACFP 13-2016, SFSP 15-2016 (continued)

- Food safety guidance
 - Repeated several times that CNP operators must be aware of and follow federal, state and local food safety codes and abide by the **most restrictive**
 - Encourages **discussing share table plans** with local health department and State Agency prior to implementing
 - Policies for saving/sharing food or beverage items must be **consistent with their HACCP Plan**
 - 5-step food safety and best practices **guide for share tables**

NC Food Code – Re-service of Food

Section 3-306.14 Returned Food and Re-Service of Food states:

(A) Except as specified in ¶ (B) of this section, after being served or sold and in the possession of a CONSUMER, FOOD that is unused or returned by the CONSUMER may not be offered as FOOD for human consumption.

(B) Except as specified under ¶ 3-801.11(G), *a container of FOOD that is not POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS (TIME/TEMPERATURE CONTROL FOR SAFETY FOOD) may be RE-SERVED from one CONSUMER to another if:*

(1) *The FOOD is dispensed so that it is protected from contamination and the container is closed between uses, such as a narrow-neck bottle containing catsup, steak sauce, or wine; or*

(2) *The FOOD, such as crackers, salt, or pepper, is in an unopened original PACKAGE and is maintained in sound condition.*

UPDATED Guidance: Re-served vs Donated

RE-SERVED

- Food that is served, then “returned” by the customer to put back into the food service operation
- That previously-served food is then re-served to another customer
- Still NOT allowed per NC Food Code*

*With limited exceptions

DONATED

- Food that is served, then:
 - Put on a share table
 - Given directly to another student
 - Other way to re-distribute food that does not meet definition of “re-service”
- Not under jurisdiction of NCDHHS EHS (e.g. health department/health inspector)

2025-2026 NC HACCP Plan – Sharing Tables

- Guidance in Part 1 of Commercial, Transported, and Homestyle HACCP Plans (*NEW guidance for SY 2025-2026*)
 - **Prerequisite Programs** (*sample screen shot from Commercial Plan*)

SHARING TABLES (IF LOCAL SFA PROCEDURES ALLOW THIS PRACTICE)	MONITORING FREQUENCY
Sharing tables, if used, are placed near the cashier or other school nutrition staff to increase ease of monitoring.	Annually
Procedures outlined in <i>Sharing Tables: Risks, best practices, and regulatory requirements</i> and the <i>Environmental Health Position Statement on Donated Foods</i> are followed. Donate foods and/or beverages according to the <i>Environmental Health Position Statement on Donated Foods</i> and a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with a non-profit organization at the end of meal service. Refer to <i>Department of Health and Human Services Division of Public Health – Food Protection Branch Position Statements</i> .	Daily

2025-2026 NC HACCP Plan – Sharing Tables (continued)

- Guidance in Part 1 of Commercial, Transported, and Homestyle HACCP Plans
 - See handout: **Sharing Tables: Risk and Regulatory Requirements in the North Carolina School Nutrition Program** – includes updated NCDHHS Position Statement from January 2025

Sharing Tables: Risks, best practices, and regulatory requirements

What are "Sharing Tables"?

In an effort to address food waste, many schools have established sharing tables where students can leave and/or take foods not consumed by the person who selected the items. These tables provide an opportunity for additional helpings of food or beverages at no cost to them.

What are the risks?

Sharing tables do not have the same controls used to keep food safe compared to food provided from the serving line. There is limited ability of school nutrition staff to control

cross-contamination, unintentional contamination, and food not properly served. This is why the service of many types of food at the sharing table has been limited. The supervision of school nutrition staff and the limitations are required by the Department of Public Health. Caution for the use of sharing tables may be limited supervision increases the risk for food safety as a result of eating food that is only for students.

Cross-contamination in the school setting is the

Sharing Tables



NC DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

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DEVPUTTA SANGVAI • Secretary
KAREN BURKES • Acting Deputy Secretary for Health
KELLY KIMPLE • Acting Director, Division of Public Health

January 31, 2025

POSITION STATEMENT: Donated Food
PURSUANT TO: N.C.G.S. 130A-248; 15A NCAC 18A .2600
SOURCE: Shane Smith, REHS
Head, Food Protection and Facilities Branch
QUESTIONS / ISSUE: What food items may be donated?
What rules must food establishments follow when donating food?

DISCUSSION/RATIONALE:

Guidance has been requested regarding the donation of food. To control food waste and provide community outreach, many food establishments donate their excess food to Food Distribution Organizations (FDO) that are exempt from regulations.

Guidance has also been requested from the Department of Public Instruction personnel regarding "sharing tables" in school cafeterias, which provide a place to share unused food items with other students.

RESPONSE / INTERPRETATION

The primary goal of food recovery programs is to collect safe and wholesome food donated from commercial sources to meet the nutritional needs of the hungry.

Sharing Table Best Practices



Photo credit: Victoria Homick

Best Practices – NCDHHS EHS Guidance

- If unserved food is donated by the food establishment, the food must meet all requirements in the NC Food Code while under the authority of the permittee (e.g., permitted school kitchen).
- If food is donated by the food establishment, it should be separated, identified, and stored in a designated area from food items intended for service to the public

- **Time control for safety (TCS) and unpackaged non-TCS food that has been served should not be donated**
- **Only packaged non-TCS foods, whole fruit or food meeting the requirements in 3-306.14(B) (1) & (2) should be donated**

Considerations for Using a Sharing Table

Who

is responsible for monitoring? Who is liable for any harm caused?

What

items are intended to go on the sharing table?

How

will items be stored at the sharing table?

When

will the sharing table be available?

Why

are they wanting to have a sharing table?

WHO - Monitoring and Oversight



Photo credit: USDA FNS Team Nutrition

- Monitored by School Nutrition or another group/individual
 - What is best way to effectively monitor?
- Who is liable if someone is harmed?
- Who could potentially be harmed?

Consult Your Legal Counsel

- Determine who will be responsible
- Consider who is legally liable
- Identify any important factors or stipulations involved



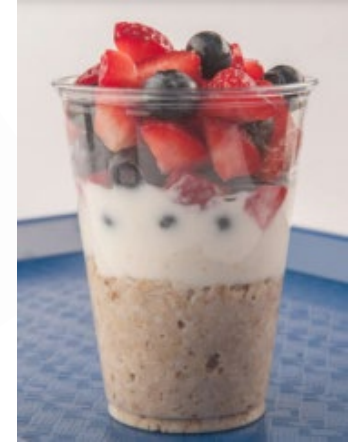
Photo credit: PowerPoint stock photo

WHAT – Ideal Items for Sharing Tables

NO*

- **ANY TCS FOODS**, including:

- Milk
- Cooked fruits/veggies
- Cooked grains (rice, pasta, etc.)
- Cut tomatoes, leafy greens, melons
- Meat, fish, poultry, other proteins
- Cheese
- Ice cream
- Yogurt
- Fruit juice (depending on manufacturer's instructions and packaging)



WHAT – Ideal Items for Sharing Tables

YES*

- Non-TCS in unadulterated commercial packages, such as:
 - Crackers
 - Cookies
 - Pastries
 - Cereal
 - Granola bars
 - Fruit juice (depending on manufacturer's instructions and packaging)
 - Bags of fresh fruit or vegetables (grape tomatoes, baby carrots, fruit slices, grapes)



WHAT – Ideal Items for Sharing Tables

YES (continued)*

- **Whole fresh fruits WITHOUT edible peel** (oranges, bananas, etc.) - unadulterated
- **Whole fresh fruits WITH edible peel IF**:**
 - Washed and wrapped/bagged prior to service
 - Unadulterated (not opened)



Photo credit: PowerPoint stock photo

***** NOTE: Local decision about fruits with edible peel; food production permit REQUIRED for washing and bagging/wrapping fresh fruit***

HOW - Storage of Items on Sharing Tables

- **TCS foods NOT recommended** (e.g. milk, cheese, yogurt, etc.)
 - If TCS foods allowed locally, ice/refrigeration and temp monitoring as best practice for maintaining safe temperatures
- Clean and sanitized table or container is best practice
- Near responsible monitoring individual(s)



Photo credit: Cathie Masters

WHEN - Availability of Sharing Table



Photo credit: Katrina Perry

- Food safety
- Oversight
- Utilization
- Stigma
- Items not taken

WHY – Potential Sharing Table Impact

Could help with:

- Reduction in food waste
- Extra food opportunities at no cost

But first – get to the ROOT of the food waste issues.



Photo credit: PowerPoint stock photo

Other Strategies to Reduce Food Waste



Photo credit: USDA FNS Team Nutrition

- Menu Forecasting
- Menu Adjustments
- Offer vs. Serve
- Seat time
- Education and Communication

Checklist for a Safe and Successful Sharing Table

- ☐ Responsibilities and liabilities are well-defined and understood
- ☐ Sharing tables are adequately monitored
- ☐ Food safety best practices are considered before, during, and after sharing table use
- ☐ Only approved foods and beverages (that meet local approval) are put on sharing table
- ☐ Foods still on the sharing table at the end of the meal service are discarded appropriately or donated according to an MOA and are not re-served at another meal or snack
- ☐ Other methods to help reduce food waste are being utilized

Questions?



Photo credit: USDA

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