

Share Tables

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) allows the use of share tables in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). USDA defines share tables as “tables or stations where children may return whole food or beverage items they choose not to eat.” Other children who want additional servings have the option to take the food or beverage items from the share table.

The following are allowable uses of the food or beverages from share tables:

- Children may take an additional serving of a food or beverage item from the share table at no cost.
- Shelf-stable food or beverage items left on the share table may be served and claimed for reimbursement during another meal service.
- Food or beverage items may be donated to a non-profit organization (see SP 11-2012: Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs) or a school program.

If donating to a non-profit organization or school program, the school food authority (SFA) is encouraged to allow students to take an additional serving of the shared foods and beverages prior to donation.

Food Safety

Per USDA guidance, the SFA must adopt a standard operating procedure (SOP) as part of their Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) plan to address food safety when operating share tables. If food will be donated to a non-profit organization or a school program, procedures should be established to ensure food safety protocols are followed after the non-profit organization or school program receives the food or beverages.

State guidance does not allow time/temperature control for safety (TCS) foods to be re-served. TCS foods may be placed on a share table, but they cannot be re-served as part of a reimbursable meal. Options for TCS foods include:

- providing a cooler or small refrigerator so TCS foods can be kept under temperature control and discarded at the end of the day or donated to a non-profit organization, and
- establishing written time as a public health control (formerly time in lieu of temperature) procedure so that TCS foods are discarded within a timeframe not to exceed four hours from the time of the original service.

Unopened, packaged, non-TCS foods are not required to be discarded at the end of the meal service. These foods may be collected and returned to the kitchen; however, they should not be stored intermixed with items that have not yet been prepared and served.

The share table needs to be supervised at all times to ensure compliance with food safety requirements. Share table supervisors ensure that only items that are not opened, punctured, or otherwise compromised are placed on the share table. If cooling bins are used, share table supervisors ensure that time and temperature controls are met.

SFAs should also seek guidance from their local health departments as they may place additional restrictions on the use of share tables.

What Can and Cannot Be Shared

Items that can be shared and re-served	Items that can be shared and must be discarded at the end of service	Items that cannot be shared
Pre-packaged food from the storeroom, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • packs of crackers, • bowls of cereal, • individually wrapped granola bars, • bags of chips, and • individually packaged cups of canned fruit. 	TCS foods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • string cheese, • pre-packaged sliced apples or baby carrots, • yogurt cups, and • deli meat. 	Opened foods, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opened bags of baby carrots, • opened milk cartons, and • opened bananas.
Whole pieces of fruit with an inedible peel or wrapped edible peel, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bananas, • oranges, and • plastic-wrapped apples. 	TCS beverages, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cartons of milk, and • juices that require refrigeration. 	Packaged items that are not sealed or can be opened and re-sealed, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • baby carrots in a zip top bag, • canned peaches in a soufflé cup with lid, • chef salads in a clam shell, and • side salads in a foam bowl.
Shelf-stable beverages, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aseptic juice boxes that do not require refrigeration, • aseptic milk boxes that do not require refrigeration, and • bottled water. 		TCS foods when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TCS foods are not pre-packaged, such as pizza slices or hot vegetables, and • temperature is not controlled or a “time as a public health control” procedure is not in place.

Reminder

The SFA is still required to plan, prepare, and order food with the intent of providing one meal per child at each meal service. While infrequent leftovers are permitted, the SFA must take action to reduce leftovers.