Cafeterias are typically included at medical centers and hospitals, nursing homes, K-12 schools and some places of business where food waste is a major component of these operations. Through partnership building however, cafeterias can reduce their food waste and disposal costs by working together with members of the community that can help implement change in the way food waste is managed. Food waste strategies through municipal policy change, donation to people and animals, composting, and anaerobic digestion can actually give your food waste value as nutrition, amending the soil, and creating energy. Covering liability protection when donating, how to solve challenges when implementing food waste reduction strategies, complying with applicable regulations, and forging partnerships within the community are important steps that have the potential to expand current options available that divert food waste from the landfill.
Forging Partnerships

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Food Recovery Hierarchy (see inside cover), there are preferred methods that divert food waste from the landfill including, 1) source reduction, 2) feeding people, 3) feeding animals, 4) anaerobic digestion, and 5) composting. However, in the fight against food waste, many times communities grapple with a lack of infrastructure, resources and expertise to accomplish initiatives that reduce food waste. A powerful tool that can be put into motion to help with the fight against food waste is to forge strategic and beneficial partnerships that increase opportunities while bringing the community together. Bringing people together from your local community or region to discuss opportunities to work together in partnership can have big impacts no matter what you’re trying to achieve.

Think about the businesses, institutions, and organizations in your community that can help. Not only should you include businesses that generate food waste and food scraps, you should also think about service organizations like the Scouts or churches, environmental clubs, businesses with fleets of vehicles that can help transport food to better uses, organics haulers and garbage companies, farmers, garden clubs, and even local government. The sky’s the limit to engaging participation from whomever wants to help create a more robust community action plan to address food waste.

Taking a deeper look into methods that reduce food waste, we can then try to identify key partners within the community that have the capacity to help. For example, organizations that feed people include food pantries, soup kitchens, and food banks. Forging a partnership between these organizations with those that regularly throw away edible foods like grocery stores, K-12 schools, convenience stores and etc. could help feed the community’s food insecure population through donation.
Likewise, feeding animals is another tactic that can help reduce food waste and partnerships could be forged between those that generate edible food that gets tossed in the garbage with local farmers, animal shelters, and zoos. Putting your local grocery store in touch with an animal shelter that needs meat donations can help the grocery store decrease disposal costs while helping the local animal shelter save money. Don’t toss pineapple tops and peels but rather give them to a local farmer to feed animals.

Moreover, anaerobic digestion facilities nearby and municipal compost sites also have the capacity to recycle inedible food waste. These businesses are ripe for partnerships with those that generate food waste and toss it in the landfill.

By defining challenges and hurdles to implementing these methods, we can also identify potential key partners within the community that may be able to help overcome these challenges. For example, a K-12 school is rescuing unopened, uneaten, whole food items from students’ trays after lunch. This includes cartons of milk, apples, yogurt, and bags of carrots. The school wants to donate these items to a local food pantry, but has no way to transport the food a couple times a week. Think about your community and businesses that have fleets of vehicles that may be interested in helping. Maybe a local realty, college, or hardware store would be willing to donate 1 hour per week to transport this food from the school to the food pantry.

Sometimes forging partnerships can use a little incentivising. Creating incentives that jump-start participation can result in a successful food waste action plan within the community. In the example above where transportation is needed to take food items to a local food pantry, maybe incentives would help find volunteers willing to transport food donations. For example, you could print up window clings for each car that transports food that proudly states they are committed to community partnerships in the fight against food waste. Or you could host an annual awards ceremony to award volunteers that help in the fight against food waste within the community. Finally, take out an ad in the local paper thanking them for their service. Recognition and positive PR are powerful tools that can be used to garner a loyal volunteer base.

Incentives also include outlining the benefits of partnering with others to divert food waste from the landfill? Benefits include decreases in disposal rates, cost savings, decreases in greenhouse gas emissions in the local landfill, tax incentives for charitable contributions, and giving back to the community through donation of food to help feed the less fortunate.

By thinking BIG-picture, food waste partnerships can include almost everyone within your community. Through working together and forming partnerships, you can increase opportunities to divert food that would have otherwise ended up in the landfill to better uses. But above all, forging partnerships can foster a sense of well-being and pride in your community when people work together for the common good.
Forging partnerships that increase opportunities to divert food waste from the landfill should include a variety of stakeholders, not just food waste generators and those that can divert it from the landfill. Be sure to include influencers within your community; people who can implement change, develop action plans, change legislation, and allocate municipal resources towards food waste diversion strategies are an important part of forging partnerships. Then, be sure to include those that generate food waste, potential transportation partners, and those that can reuse and/or recycle food waste.
Influencers

City Council Members
County Board of Supervisors
Community Leaders
Community Organizers
Utilities Director
Municipal Leaders
Local Landfill
Community Organizers
Elected Officials
Mayor
Main Street Organization
Economic Development
Better Business Bureau

Food Waste Generators

K-12 Schools
Convenience Stores
Grocery Stores
Food Manufacturers
Food Banks
Retirement Facilities
Bakeries
Casinos
Restaurants

Transportation

Haulers - Garbage and Organics Haulers
Clubs - Science, Social Action, Green Teams, Garden Clubs
Businesses with Fleets of Vehicles - car dealerships, realties, grocery stores, restaurants
Residential Volunteers
City Leaders
School Employees

Recipient of Food Waste

Farmers that Compost
Compost Operations
Anaerobic Digesters
Food Banks / Pantries
Homeless Shelters
Animal Shelters
Zoos
Farmers that Feed Animals
Soup Kitchens
Cafeterias and buffet lines, in their glutinous glory, create an environment that actually promotes food waste. Offering customers trays to place food on also increases the amount of food waste that ends up in the landfill. Even though these types of dining establishments have their place in society, small changes can make a big impact. One of the easiest ways to decrease food waste and associated disposal costs is to implement a donation table where customers can place uneaten, whole, unopened food to be donated.

If your cafeteria or buffet is interested in setting up a donation table, the following considerations should be discussed and planned:

- Clear signage as to what exactly can be placed on the donation table is extremely important so that customers want to donate their uneaten food without confusion.

- A trained staff person must monitor the donation table to check for integrity of packaging and food items.

- Perishable food items must be placed on ice or in a refrigerator to maintain food safety. It’s a good idea to check and record temperatures of perishable food items on the donation table and anything on ice blocks should be placed in the freezer or refrigerator as quickly as possible.

- Whole fresh fruit with an edible peel should be re-washed prior to donation

- The donation table must be placed away from sources of potential cross-contamination such as garbage cans.

- Tracking food donations can provide you with data you can proudly share with your customer-base.

- Make certain you are following food safety policies required by the donation organization, as well as local, state, and federal requirements.

Many businesses don’t donate food because they falsely believe there is no liability protection. The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, passed in 1996 is federal legislation that protects donors of food from liability except under circumstances of gross negligence or intentional misconduct. Schools,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Challenges Associated with Donation</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation of donations</td>
<td>If you don’t have transportation to take your food donations to the recipient organization, call upon local businesses to help. Reward volunteers for transporting your donations to garner their support and additional volunteers including awards, window clings, an ad in the local paper thanking them, and etc. Ask recipient organizations such as food banks and pantries if they can pick up your donations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donation table in cafeteria is regularly contaminated with food items not accepted</td>
<td>Create clear and concise signage that includes pictures of items accepted AND items not accepted. The simpler the signage, the less confusing it will be. Position a staff member at the donation table to help customers with the process. Hand sort through items on the donation table to remove unwanted items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liability is a concern</td>
<td>There is federal liability protection when food items are donated in good faith, meaning they are believed to be safe to consume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of storage space for donations</td>
<td>No freezer or refrigerator space - contact your local appliance business and see if they would be willing to donate storage for this great cause. Purchase used appliances to save money. Seek grant opportunities to purchase storage space. Find out if neighboring businesses have storage space you can use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of administrative support to donate</td>
<td>Provide information regarding liability protection. Provide information regarding tax deductions associated with donation. Outline strategies to utilize the positive PR associated with donation. Outline a plan and procedure to donate. Look up your local area’s poverty rates to make a case for donation and giving back to the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Liability Protection (continued)**

gleaners, farmers, food banks, restaurants, grocers, food manufacturers, food service, caterers, and food trucks are covered. The broad definition of “person” that can donate within the Bill Emerson Act includes corporations, partnerships, organizations, and associations covered under the legislation. However, foods must be donated to nonprofit organizations for distribution to needy people and families. The act does not cover direct donations to people, but must rather go through a nonprofit organization that gives the food to those in need at no charge.
Illinois requires state agencies (such as cafeterias in prisons, schools, and other state agencies that serve food) that enter into contracts with food providers to allow for food donation to food banks, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and food banks. A food provider may not include, in a contract with a state agency, a clause which prohibits food donation. Additionally, each state agency that holds a contract to purchase food must adopt a policy that allows the donation of left-over food purchased with state funds for both daily food operations and one-time events. The policy must include a list of nearby soup kitchens, food pantries and other non-profit organizations that accept left-over food donations. Each employee of the state agency must receive a copy of the policy and the agency’s food donation policy must be shared with the Department of Central Management Services on an annual basis beginning December 31, 2018.

Share tables at K-12 schools must follow local and state health and food safety codes and it is noted that these codes may be more restrictive than the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) requirements.

Also, the Food and Drug Administration’s Food Code must be followed.
Wisconsin delves into sharing tables located at K-12 schools with a note that food safety decisions associated with food donations are made at the discretion of the sanitarian and according to all local regulatory authorities, ordinances and the Wisconsin Food Code. Wisconsin policies are as follows:

- The school board or administrator must state in writing that sharing tables are allowed at specific serving locations.
- The school board/administrator must accept liability in the event of a food borne illness or injury related to the share table.
- Parents must be informed in writing that the school has a sharing table policy, however food allergies are of important concern.
- The school must include a standard operating procedure that includes what school meal or after school snack items are allowed on the sharing table, what will be used as a sharing table, and the responsibility for proper disposal of any remaining food items at the conclusion of meal/after school snack program.
- Food service staff must work with the environmental health specialist that conducts food safety inspections while focusing on food safety of sharing table items; especially foods that require temperature controls to maintain food safety.
- Foods brought from home or elsewhere are not allowed on the share table.
- Fruits and vegetables with edible peels must be washed and pre-wrapped or packaged for meal service if they are allowed on the sharing table.
- Unconsumed foods can be placed on the share table that is a designated counter, cart, table or space and must also have signage identifying it as the sharing table so as not to confuse it with regular meal offerings.
- Food items reserved need to be inspected by a designated food service staff to ensure original packaging is in-tact and maintained in sound condition and this employee will receive training so the SOP for the share table is followed.
- Sharing tables are for students only. No adults may use sharing tables.
Minnesota outlines share table policies in an effort to reduce food waste in K-12 schools. Foods that are shelf stable, unopened, and pre-packaged are allowed on the share table. This includes, but is not limited to condiments, drinks, cereal packs, and granola bars. Fruits and vegetables that are wrapped and fruits with intact thick skins such as washed apples, bananas, and oranges are also allowed to be placed on share tables. Perishable food items can also be placed on share tables, however they must be pre-packaged and temperature control mechanisms must be in place to maintain food safety. Foods that are not allowed on share tables includes unpackaged food items, opened packaged food items, packaged foods that can be opened and resealed, or items from home.

Minnesota also requires that K-12 schools have a standard operating procedure for share table practices that is shared with the health sanitarium and must be included in the school’s Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) plan, which is a food safety plan required by the USDA. Additionally, the share table must be monitored to ensure allowable items are untampered, packaging is intact, items are clean and expirations dates have not yet passed. Food items must be properly stored and served first at the next meal service. Finally, share tables are for students only. Minnesota also outlines best practices that includes the following:

- The share table must be located away from points of potential contamination, such as by garbage bins
- Only allow foods to be placed on share tables and/or reused once by marking returned foods
- Place signs on share table that outlines the rules
- Invite students to help with the share table
- Provide families with information about the share table and the guidelines that must be followed
Iowa allows share tables at K-12 schools however only shelf stable foods are allowed. The following requirements must be followed when implementing and maintaining a share table:

- Students must not feel pressured to donate.
- A list of acceptable foods and unacceptable foods must be compiled.
- Foods must be whole, unopened, uneaten in original packaging.
- The share table must be monitored by a trained adult and students who work with the share table must be supervised.
- Students are required to place items on the share table prior to leaving the cafeteria.
- Share tables are for students only.
- Share table must be located away from potential contamination sources.
- Foods from home are not allowed.
- Donated whole fruits with edible peels must be rewashed prior to reuse.
- A standard operating procedure must be developed and included with the school’s Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) plan, which is a food safety plan required by the USDA.

If a K-12 school in Iowa would like to include perishable food items on the share table, a variance must be granted by the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals. The variance requires a plan to maintain food safety and cold storage equipment is required where students place perishable food items. In addition, the variance requires the trained monitor to record temperatures of perishable food items every day. The variance process is facilitated by the Iowa Department of Education.
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University of Northern Iowa
Iowa Waste Reduction Center
319-273-8905
iwrc@uni.edu
iwrc.uni.edu/food-waste

University of Northern Iowa
BCS Building, Suite 113
Cedar Falls, IA 50613