

# HELPING SCHOOLS SAVE FOOD: Food Donation



## An Introduction for Alameda County Schools

Even with careful planning, schools and other organizations that serve prepared food typically have surplus edible food. Donating this food for people to eat may not only prevent waste but can also help alleviate hunger among those without reliable access to affordable, nutritious food.

Federal and state laws protect and encourage food donation. California recently passed three laws: AB 1219, the Good Samaritan Donation Act, protects donors of surplus food from liability while SB 1383 establishes a state-wide goal to recover and donate 20% of edible food currently going to waste by the year 2025. In addition, SB 557 explicitly allows public schools to donate food items that have been served and placed on share tables.

This guide provides an introductory resource, highlighting donation considerations and available resources to support your K-12 food donation program.

*Thanks to the Oakland Unified School District for piloting the best practices shared in this guide, and to the Alameda County Department of Environmental Health for providing valuable guidance.*



**OAKLAND UNIFIED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
Community Schools, Thriving Students



# School Food Donation



## Why Set Up a Food Donation Program?

- **Feed hungry people** — One in five Alameda County residents are food insecure; two thirds of those in need are seniors and children.
- **Teach by example** — A school food donation program provides students with an opportunity to understand the value of food and how they can positively impact the environment and community.
- **Help the environment** — Wasted food decomposes anaerobically (without air) in landfills, generating methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas. Food donation can reduce these environmental impacts.
- **Get recognition** — The U.S. EPA and USDA both offer Food Waste and Food Recovery Challenges and acknowledge participating schools for their role in protecting the environment.
- **Act on laws** legally protecting and encouraging food donation, such as the California Good Samaritan Donation Act (AB 1219), the USDA National School Lunch Act, as well as several California state laws.

## Gathering Food for Donation

### Seasonally generated surplus food

Before school closes for longer periods of time during winter and summer breaks, kitchen pantries should be inventoried to sort out foods that will expire before school starts up again. While non-perishable goods like sugar, dried beans and canned foods will keep during these times, perishables like fruit and vegetables as well as some semi-perishable foods like flour and other grain products that are close to expiration can usually be donated to the Alameda County Community Food Bank.

### Surplus food generated year-round

Throughout the school year, surplus food including prepared food, may be generated from meal service.

Some options before considering food donation:

- Re-serve surplus fruit and sealed non-perishable food items (cereal, crackers, nut mix, etc.) in subsequent meal services,
- Transfer items to other school sites,
- Set up a food share station in the school cafeteria by the waste sorting station.



*Food Share Stations in school cafeterias can help capture unwanted and still sealed food items to be served again or donated.*

At the food share station, students are asked to place their unwanted, still sealed or unbitten food into the designated food share containers. Other students can select these items at no cost during mealtime.

Along with surplus food collected through food share, the kitchen may have items that won't be used for the next day's service. These food items can be donated as well, along with the food share surplus items.

For more information about how to set up a Food Share Table refer to StopWaste's Food Share Table Guide at: [www.StopWaste.org/foodsharetable](http://www.StopWaste.org/foodsharetable).



## Distributing Donated Food

There are several ways a school can donate cafeteria surplus food. A few models are described below.

### Food to Students and School Families

Partnering with a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, the school develops and oversees a distribution program that provides surplus food to student families who pick up and take home donated food during scheduled distribution periods at school.



*School surplus food can be distributed to low income students and their families, if coordinated with the assistance of a nonprofit.*

### Warehouse Backhaul to Community Partners

This model is currently being piloted at select schools within the Oakland Unified School District. The school district's refrigerated food service trucks pick up surplus food items when they drop off meals at the school. The collected food donation items go back to the warehouse to be consolidated with food donation collected from other school sites and remain in cold storage until the scheduled pickup by a community partner.

### Food to Community Partners

Under this program, the school partners with the school district's food service department and an approved local nonprofit who picks up surplus food from the school site on a regular basis and distributes it to community members in need.

## Donations Make a Difference!

*Schools that have adopted these practices are reducing waste and feeding the community.*

- **170 surplus food items were rescued on average, from ONE elementary school each day of the school year.**
- **4,000 surplus food items were rescued from the back of the kitchen—from ONE high school in ONE year!**



*Many community partner organizations like Grace Baptist Church in Oakland dispatch trained volunteers to pick up surplus food donations.*

## Legal Protections

Two federal laws, the Good Samaritan Food Act and the National School Lunch Act, provide legal protections for school food donation programs. The School Lunch Act gives schools the authority to donate surplus food, and the Good Samaritan Food Act protects donor schools from liability when food is donated in good faith to charitable organizations. This includes the protection from civil and criminal liability even if a donated product causes harm to the recipient, provided it was handled in a manner that kept it safe for human consumption.

## Food Safety Considerations

In spite of legal protections, establishing and following strict food safety protocols are critical. Schools in Alameda County are required to set up **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** for food donation to ensure food safety, in line with the requirements of the Alameda County Environmental Health Department. For sample SOP's visit [www.StopWaste.org/SKI](http://www.StopWaste.org/SKI).

### General Food Safety & Storage Best Practices

As a general guideline, schools can ensure food safety by maintaining strict temperature control throughout the "life" of the food product by observing protocols for ***Foods Served Under Strict Temperature Controls***. Strict Temperature Control is ensured when foods are kept under proper refrigeration (at or below 45°F for unopened cartons of milk, at or below 41°F for all other foods) or held in a hot holding unit (at or above 135°F) from production or delivery throughout lunch service. Donated food products kept under strict temperature control after meal service should be used by recipients within 5-7 days.

### Refrigerators and Freezers

Most properly refrigerated foods will last several days without safety concerns, as long as best practices are observed. For example, hot food should never be placed directly into a refrigerator or freezer as it can heat up previously cooled or frozen items. Also, refrigerators



and freezers should not be filled more than three-quarters of capacity and items should not be stacked directly on top of each other in order to allow for proper air circulation and even cooling or freezing.

### Date Marking

Prepared foods should be labeled with the date prepared and discarded 7 days after preparation. Freezing can extend the storage time by 1-2 months for some food items.

**For more guidance on shelf life of food items and expiration dates refer to the resources listed below.**

## More Information & Resources

For links to the resources below and more information visit [www.StopWaste.org/smart-kitchen-initiative](http://www.StopWaste.org/smart-kitchen-initiative)

**California Good Samaritan Food Donation Act (AB 1219)**  
[www.cawrecycles.org/ab1219eggman/](http://www.cawrecycles.org/ab1219eggman/)

**Guidance on Donation of Leftover Food in Child Nutrition Programs**  
[www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/cnp022018.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/cnp022018.asp)

**OUSD Greengloves Program**  
[www.ousd.org/greengloves](http://www.ousd.org/greengloves)

**StillTasty** (USDA Guidance on Shelf Life and Expiration Dates) [www.stilltasty.com](http://www.stilltasty.com)

## Questions?

For questions about starting or improving a food donation program at your school, please contact:

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