

**Alabama State Department of Education
Child Nutrition Programs
School Nutrition Programs**

Share Table Policy

Share tables are designated areas where students may place one or more food or beverage items from their reimbursable meal that they choose not to consume, allowing other students to take additional servings at no cost. A reimbursable meal is a meal that meets USDA meal pattern requirements and is eligible for federal reimbursement. However, there may be times when a student does not want to eat a particular item included in that meal. School food authorities (SFAs) may implement share tables in cafeterias or classrooms to reduce food waste and encourage the consumption of nutritious foods, provided their use is permitted by the local health department and aligned with the SFA's written procedures. School nutrition programs strive to offer appealing, nutritious, and healthy food choices as a reimbursable meal while managing food purchases and inventories of the federal program as responsibly and efficiently as possible.

Food Safety Requirements

1. The SFA should obtain clearance from the local health department for share tables.
2. The SFA's Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan must have standard operating procedures for share tables, including at a minimum:
 - a. Managing and supervising the share table.
 - b. Record keeping procedures.
 - c. Food allergy procedures.
 - d. Required signage about allowable items, unallowable items, and allergy warnings.
 - e. Time/temperature controls for safety.

Supervision of the Share Table

1. School sites with a share table must assign an employee with an unobstructed view of the share table to supervise the share table and intervene as needed to prevent or stop:
 - a. Any opened, punctured or otherwise inappropriate item from being placed on the share table.
 - b. Any potential food safety concern.
 - c. Any improper use of the share table by students.
 - d. Any use of the share table by adults.
2. The supervisor or manager may suspend use of the share table at any time if there are immediate concerns.
3. Supervisors monitor and document required time/temperature controls in accordance with the SFA's standard operating procedures.

Allowable/Unallowable Items on a Share Table

1. Allowable items:
 - a. Unopened commercially packaged shelf-stable items, such as crackers or granola bars
 - b. Whole fruits with inedible or wrapped edible peels, such as bananas, oranges, or wrapped apples
 - c. Unopened shelf-stable beverages, such as aseptic juice or milk¹
 - d. Perishable foods that require time/temperature controls for safety, such as commercially-packaged string cheese, sliced apples, baby carrots, or individual juice or milk cartons, if appropriate controls are in place
2. Unallowable items:
 - a. Unpackaged items, such as a salad bowl without a lid
 - b. Packaged items that can be opened and resealed
 - c. Open packages
 - d. Perishable food when appropriate time/temperature controls for safety are not available
 - e. Any food or beverage brought from home or purchased elsewhere
 - f. Any item that has been opened, bitten, or unsealed

Re-serving or Discarding Food Left on Share Tables

1. Shelf-stable and aseptic items may be picked up at the end of a meal service and used in future reimbursable meals or snacks.
2. Shelf-stable and aseptic items reclaimed from the share table may not be stored with foods that have not yet been prepared and served.
3. Time/temperature-controlled items may not be returned to inventory or served in a later meal service.

Donating Food

1. Shelf-stable and aseptic items left on the share table may be donated to an eligible nonprofit organization, such as a local food bank, food pantry, or child or adult care center.
2. Time/temperature-controlled items may be donated to an eligible nonprofit organization. The SFAs are required to maintain donation records that identify the date, what is being donated, the amount, and food safety procedures in place at the time of transfer.
3. Federal and state laws provide civil and criminal liability protections for such donations made in good faith. State and local health regulations must be met.

Program Integrity

1. CNP directors are responsible for planning, preparing, and ordering food with the goal of providing one meal per participant at each meal service.
2. CNP directors should monitor share tables for foods that are frequently placed on or left on the share table and adjust menu planning and purchasing accordingly.

¹ An aseptic beverage has been sterilized and sealed in sterile packaging in a germ-free environment to allow the product to remain-shelf stable without refrigeration.

3. CNP directors should monitor production and donation levels to guard against potential overproduction for the purpose of donation.
4. Share tables should not be used to dispose of excess inventory or items nearing expiration.

Policy Approved: 8-6-2026

Appendix: Links to Resources

USDA Policy Memo: SP 41-2016, CACFP 13-2016, SFSP 15-2016

The Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs (June 22, 2016)

[Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs | USDA](#)

USDA Policy Memo: SP 11-2012, CACFP 05-2012, SFSP 07-2012

Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs (February 3, 2012)

[Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition](#)

Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act

[42 USC 1791: Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act](#)