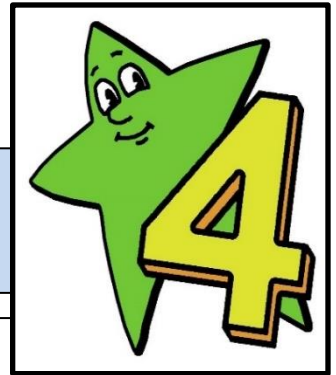


# Take a Bite Out of Food Waste



eco-cycle

## Snapshot

This student-led initiative will bring attention to the amount of food (and money) being wasted in school cafeterias.

<https://bit.ly/eco-cycle-zero-waste-schools-guide>

**Objective:** Students will have a visual concept of the approximate amount of food being thrown away each day in their school's cafeteria. They will understand that wasting food is wasting natural resources.

**Age Groups:** K-12<sup>th</sup> grade

**Setting:** School cafeteria

**Project Duration:** One week

## Materials:

- Waste bin labeled "Food Waste Only"
- Bathroom scale
- Pictures of food from magazines or internet
- Poster-making materials: posterboard, glue, markers, scissors

## Why This Project Matters:

15-50% of school food is wasted daily. That's no surprise since U.S. food waste has been estimated to be up to 50% of the edible food supply. All of that uneaten food equals wasted water, land, and other resources. Buried in a landfill, it will result in the production of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

## Project Summary:

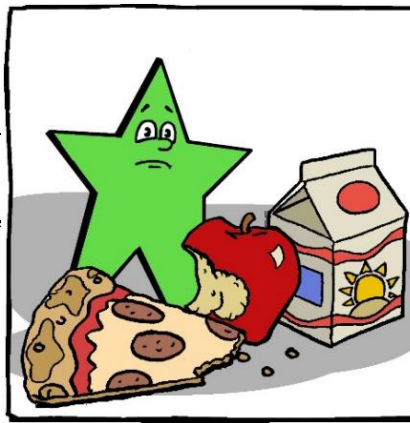
This educational campaign will bring students' attention to the food being wasted in their school cafeteria, regardless of whether the school has implemented a compost collection system. The "Take a Bite Out of Food Waste" campaign may lead to long-term changes that reduce the amount of food waste produced at school, decrease the cost of school waste disposal, and improve students' diets.

## Implementation:

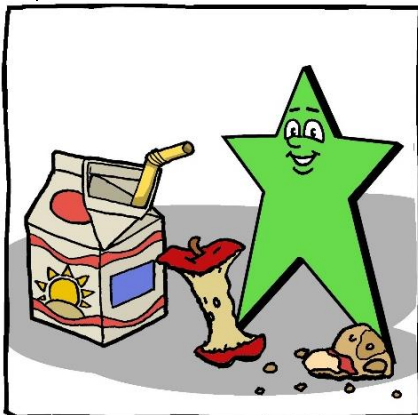
1. Coordinate with school administration and cafeteria staff to select a week for implementation. Ask for a group of student volunteers to help with the campaign.
2. On a day prior to starting the campaign, collect unwanted food in a waste bin labeled "Food Waste Only" during the entire lunch period (see printable example below). Have an adult (staff or parent volunteer) assist students with this task. Include student volunteers while weighing the food waste on a scale and record the amount.
3. Report the pre-project weight to the school community. Use an analogy so students can better grasp the amount (e.g., "Our food waste today weighed 100 pounds! That's like throwing away the weight of two first-graders every day!")

**FOOD WASTE ONLY**  
**(uneaten foods from your lunch)**

4. With the help of students, write and share announcements for “Take a Bite Out of Food Waste” week. Have students include reminders about which natural resources are used to grow our food (e.g., “Remember, it takes water to grow fruits and veggies! Don’t waste water by throwing away food!”).
5. Develop messages (emails, newsletter notices, etc.) to send home to families reminding them about the “Take a Bite Out of Food Waste” week. Include tips for packing lunches that may help reduce food waste, such as: foods that you are confident your child will eat, fruit cut into kid-friendly sizes (whole fruit is more likely to be thrown away), smaller portions of each food type, etc. Remind parents that uneaten food equals wasted resources and money.
6. Invite parents to join their kids at lunch during the campaign week so they can experience how lunchtime works in the cafeteria, observe the types of foods being served, and witness how others are reducing food waste.
7. Have students decorate and display posters that include the dates of the campaign and the food waste messages featured in the announcements and family letters.
8. Encourage students to create a visual food waste display representing the typical amount of food discarded by one student vs. the amount made by the whole school. Place it near the cafeteria doors for students to see as they enter.
9. Have a few student volunteers stationed in the cafeteria during lunch time to help remind other students to eat what they take and take what they eat.
10. On the final day of the campaign week, collect and weigh the food waste again. Report the progress to the school community. (If time permits, weigh the food waste every day during the week and chart for students to view.)
11. Develop an age-appropriate questionnaire to find out why students throw away their food. Look at other food trends in the school. Is there a correlation between the meal being served and the amount of food waste being generated? Use



the results from this research to help influence student behavior and possibly make changes in cafeteria practices.



### Extensions:

Long-term food waste-reduction strategies:

- *Recess before lunch*
  - Studies show that scheduling recess before lunch can significantly reduce student food waste. Students are more ready to settle down to eat after having a chance to run, play, and exert energy. The school’s existing schedule can still be used by reversing the lunch and recess blocks, eliminating the need for additional staffing.
- *Extend lunchtime*
  - Increasing lunch time by five minutes can make a huge difference in food waste. Throwing away food due to the lack of adequate eating time is one of the most student-cited reasons for why they toss food in the trash.

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**Assessment:**

Ask students questions about where their food comes from while they are enjoying lunch or as they drop their items at the waste station. Ask about the natural resources needed to grow crops for produce and raise animals for meat.

**Related Activities:**

Waste-Free Lunch – Chapter 2  
Conducting a Waste Audit – Chapter 30



**Extensions:**  
(continued)

- *Examine the lunch program*
  - School lunch programs have strict regulations, particularly about which types of foods are served and how many items students must take. Find ways to increase opportunities for students to choose their own items rather than being served pre-chosen foods (such as offering salad bars and self-serve milk stations).
  - Work with kitchen staff on ways they can increase the likelihood of students eating the food they take by identifying popular food choices and exploring ways of preparing similar menu items.
  - Adjusting the serving styles of food may reduce waste (such as providing sliced fruit instead of whole fruit since slices are easier for students to eat).