

Food Waste Reduction and Recycling

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

This content represents the opinions of youth in the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council and does not reflect the opinions of the State of Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about this guide, please contact amaleltayib27@gmail.com.

An Overview

Why should schools care?

Every year in Iowa, 495,300 tons of recyclable materials build up in landfills, and more than 190,000 tons of unopened, untouched food is trashed ([Iowa DNR](#)). Perfectly edible food is ending up in our landfills and our recyclables are not getting recycled. However, there are steps that schools can take to alleviate this waste, which this guide will explain.

What does this document cover?

This document covers practical steps that schools can take to implement food waste reduction and recycling programs in their schools. It outlines potential programs and solutions, detailed logistics, legality, and the works. In addition, resources and tools are hyperlinked throughout for readers to peruse as needed.

In one meal, students from 30 schools across the country gathered:



[Cafeteria Waste \(National Consumers League\)](#)

How should this guide be used?

Choose your school's area of focus or primary concern (food waste, recycling, or both) and your level of involvement (low, medium, or high if available). Involvement levels are based on the amount of time and resources they require to implement, so it is important for schools to consider both feasibility and sustainability when looking through each level. Each section of this guide outlines clear, feasible steps for implementing these programs in your school. Throughout the guide, numerous resources are hyperlinked for your reference. If you are reading a physical copy, the links include the website name and publication date, which can be accessed electronically.

Food Waste

Background Information

Donatable and shareable foods are considered legal for schools to share, donate, and distribute. They are defined by the [Iowa Department of Education](#) as:

- Shelf-stable food in original, unopened containers within 1-2 weeks of expiration dates
 - Examples: apple sauce cups, crackers, granola bars
- Washed whole fruit with an edible peel and no indication of mold, rotting, or significant bruising
 - Examples: pears, apples, bananas

Low Involvement: Share Tables in Schools

A share table is defined as:

- A designed space (often a simple cart or table) where students can leave unwanted foods
- Students who want additional food can then enjoy it during meal-time at no additional cost
- This addresses both food insecurity and waste within schools at no cost to them



[Photo of a Share Table](#)

Share tables must...

- Adhere to state guidelines (see Background Information above)
- Be clearly labeled and include posted signage detailing which foods are and aren't shareable



[Signage example #1](#)



[Signage example #2](#)

These programs are legal under FNS Instruction 786-6 given they comply with local regulations.

For additional guidance, view:

- [Sharing Tables at School: Fact Sheet](#)
- [A Toolkit for Implementing Share Tables in Municipal Schools](#)
- [Use of Share Tables in School Nutrition Programs](#)

Food Waste Continued

Medium Involvement: Food Pantry Donations

This is very similar to the Share Table program, but the food collected is donated rather than being redistributed within the school.

- Unused food can be periodically collected and donated to pantries

Schools should contact their local food pantries to determine logistics and pantry needs

- The website [Find Food](#) can help schools locate a pantry near them
- Schools have the option to use our email template to contact pantries
 - Note that food pantries may be very busy, especially during school hours
 - Consider calling if a response has not been received after several weeks of initial contact

Food donations from schools to food pantries are legal under the [Bill Emerson Act](#) (this Act is also referred to as the Good Samaritan Act)

- For additional information on legal protections, please view the [USDA Good Samaritan Act](#)
- Donated food MUST adhere to state guidelines (see Background Information above)

Labor will be required to run this program, so schools must consider procedures for:

- Collecting donatable food
- Delivering food to pantries
- Increasing student awareness about the program
 - Social media, posters, and newsletters are common ways to advertise

Consider student involvement, where age appropriate, in the collection and delivery process. Offering volunteer hours is a great way to incentivize participation in the food pantry donation program.

For additional guidance, view:

- [Guidance on the Food Donation Program in the Child Nutrition Program](#)
- [Food Donation Guide: Helping Schools Save Food](#)

High Involvement: School-Based Food Pantry

Many schools have their own food pantries with tremendous success in food waste reduction.

- Similar to share tables, students are able to donate their unopened food and fresh fruit
- Students are able to take food from the pantry as needed, either to eat during mealtime or at home
- Unused food can be periodically collected and donated to pantries

While school-based food pantries are outside the scope of this guide, we encourage interested schools to look into creating a pantry in their schools. Some resources to get started are:

- [School Food Pantry Program](#)
- [Promising Practices for Starting & Maintaining a School Food Pantry](#)
- [Managing a School Food Pantry](#)

Please note that the resources above are intended to give more information about the logistics of school-based food pantries—they do not contain applicable legal code or instruction.

Recycling

Background Information

In Iowa, blue recycling bins are used to collect “traditional recyclables”

- Traditional recyclables include bottles, paper products, and cans
- These products are the MOST likely to be trashed in schools if no alternative is provided
- For more detailed information on the recycling of cans, please view “Medium Involvement”



Low Involvement: Recycling Bins in Schools

The low involvement recycling program entails placing blue recycling bins in each respective classroom in a school building

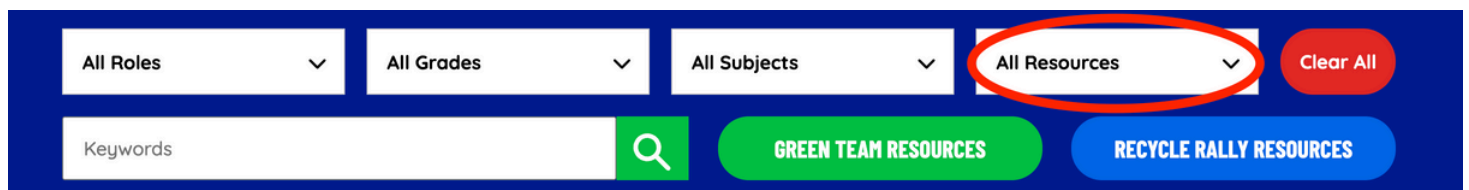
If able, schools can independently purchase bins at a local supermarket or manufacturer

- Starting points to look include Lowe’s, The Container Store, and Trash Can’s Warehouse

If a school cannot afford to buy bins, there are other alternatives, including:

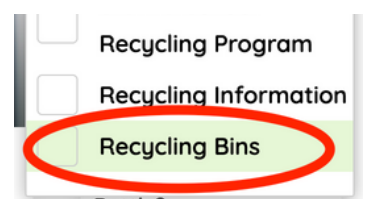
- Reaching out to their local sanitation department
- Host fundraisers for students and community members to donate
- [Recycle Rally](#) has step-by-step instructions on making your own recycling bins
 - To view tutorials, select “Recycling Bins” under the “All Resources” tab (see below)
 - These fun tutorials could make for a great class project in elementary schools
- Apply for grant money to purchase recycling bins
 - The blog [Clear River](#) contains more information on recycling grants

Locating Recycle Rally Bin Instructions



On the Recycle Rally website, you will find a blue bar on the front page. To find resources for building at-home recycling bins...

1. Select “All Resources” as shown above
2. Check “Recycling Bins” as shown on the right
3. Scroll through the list of tutorials and creative ideas



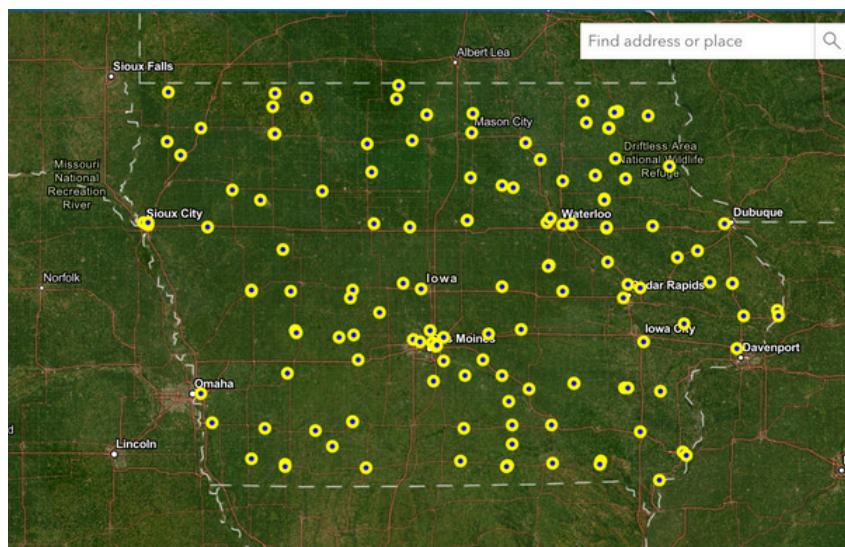
Recycling Continued

Medium Involvement: Drink Can Recycling in Schools

Once a school has implemented the low involvement steps, the next level is to include separate recycling bins for drink cans

- Under [Iowa's Beverage Containers Control Law](#), ALL carbonated beverages have a 5-cent deposit
 - This means that collected cans can be taken to a redemption center
 - The resulting "profit" from the collected waste can be reinvested into the school in any way
- Schools can locate a redemption center via the [Iowa Department of Natural Resources website](#)

This is legal proprietarily, because when a student or other person discards cans *on school grounds*, they effectively abandon not only the property but their right to the cans.



There are over 40 deposit [redemption centers](#) in Iowa

High Involvement: Increasing Student Awareness on Recycling

Once a school has stationed traditional and can recycling bins in all classrooms, it is important to ensure that the student body knows how to properly use each

- Schools can give a short lesson on recycling
- This could be done during study halls, an assembly, or via email
- Lessons should include information about why we recycle as well as what can or can't be recycled
 - Schools have the option to use our prepared recycling lesson slides and email template

Why is Composting Not Included in this Guide?

Composting is a much more regulated, expensive, and time-consuming process than recycling. That being said, many schools in Iowa CAN and DO compost.

If a school is interested in a composting program, please view the guides and resources below:

- [Cornell University: School Composting - Let's Get Growing!](#)
- [Guide to Starting a School Compost Program in Your School](#)
- [Composting At Your School: A "How to..." guide](#)

About SIYAC



The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC) is an organization that provides youth the opportunity to voice their opinions and thoughts. All members of the council are geographically distributed across the state of Iowa. The council works closely with a group of people ranging from the ages of 14-21 as well as people outside of the council. People outside of the council who often work with members of SIYAC include Health and Human Services (HHS) employees, state legislators, and other people who relate to a topic that a committee is working on. All members of SIYAC must develop communication skills and the ability to work with others. One way this can be done is through different creative and innovative ideas of spreading the thoughts members discuss together, and one-way SIYAC does this is through committees.

The STEM Committee on SIYAC aims to tackle environmental and STEM-related issues in Iowa. Currently, their priorities are mainly comprised of statewide food waste reduction in schools, implementing STEM kit programs in libraries, and providing online resources for Iowan youth to explore STEM fields.

For more information about SIYAC and our priorities, please contact kayla.powell@hhs.iowa.gov.