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Guidance for School Share Tables

To reduce food waste, many schools in Ohio are operating share tables, in which foods that are served to students but not consumed are placed on a table for other students to take at no charge.

Section 3717-1-03.2(X) of the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code states the following:

After being served or sold and in the possession of a consumer, food that is unused or returned by the consumer may not be offered as food for human consumption; except a container of food that is not time/temperature controlled for safety may be re-served from one consumer to another if:

- (1) The population served is not as specified in paragraphs (F)(1) and (F)(2) of rule 3717-1-03.7 of the Administrative Code; and*
- (2) The food is dispensed so that it is protected from contamination and the container is closed between uses, such as a narrow-neck bottle containing catsup, steak sauce, or wine; or*
- (3) The food, such as crackers, salt, or pepper, is in an unopened original package and is maintained in sound condition.*

The Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Department of Agriculture provide the following guidance for food service operations (FSOs) and retail food establishments (RFEs) that wish to operate a share table:

1. Except for fruits that require peeling such as bananas or oranges, all foods placed on the share table should be in an intact package.
2. Time/Temperature Controlled for Safety (TCS) foods placed on the share table should be held at 41°F or below by using mechanical refrigeration, ice bath, or other method. If it is not possible to hold TCS foods at 41°F or below: the foods should remain on the table for no more than three hours; the time the foods are held on the table above 41°F should be monitored by staff; and the foods should be discarded after three hours and may not be re-served or donated.
3. The share table should be monitored by staff and any foods that have been opened, punctured, or contaminated or adulterated in any way should be discarded.
4. It is also recommended that any FSO or RFE wishing to operate a share table consult with their local health department to ensure the FSO or RFE complies with the Ohio Uniform Food Safety Code.
5. Any foods left on the table at the end of meal service shall not be returned to the FSO or RFE for re-sale or re-service. The following foods left on the share table at the end of meal service may be donated: commercially pre-packaged TCS foods that are in an intact package and have been properly held at 41°F or below, and commercially pre-packaged non-TCS foods that are in an intact package. All other foods left on the table shall be discarded.
6. For food safety information regarding food donations, please refer to the Comprehensive Resource for Food Recovery Programs guidance document developed by the Conference for Food Protection: <http://www.foodprotect.org/media/guide/comprehensive-resource-for-food-recovery-2016-version.pdf>.

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