



How to Set Up a Food Scrap Recycling Program

Including waste reduction, food sharing and food audit guidance

Recycling has been mandatory in Connecticut for a number of items since January 1, 1991, with additional materials added in 2012. Schools are not exempt from these laws. Review [CT Mandatory Recycling](#) in accordance with Section 22a-208v and 22a-256a of the Connecticut General Statutes to learn more about items required to be collected for recycling in Connecticut.

In 2011, Connecticut passed a [Commercial Organics Recycling Law \(CORL\)](#). The law has changed over time, becoming more strict in who must recover source separated organic materials (SSOM) (i.e. food scraps), including [Public Act 24-45](#), which added certain K-12 public and nonpublic schools to the list of entities subject to the law.

Return to main [School Recycling and Composting](#) webpage to learn more about how to start a recycling program in your school to comply with Connecticut's mandatory recycling laws.

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Your School May Be Legally Required to Collect Food Scraps

Public Act 24-45 states:

(5) On and after July 1, 2026, each public or nonpublic school building or educational facility in which students in grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, or any combination thereof, are enrolled, that is located not more than twenty miles from either an authorized source separated organic material composting facility and that generates an average projected volume of not less than twenty-six tons per year of source-separated organic materials shall: (A) Separate such source separated organic materials from other solid waste; and (B) ensure that such source-separated organic materials are recycled at any authorized source-separated organic material composting facility that has available capacity and that will accept such source-separated organic material.

Note, a 20-mile radius determines if your school is triggered by Public Act 24-45, however it does not state which facility to bring your food scraps to. [Where do food scraps go.](#)

Calculating the Amount of Food Scraps Your School Generates

How do I know if my school is triggered by the law?

If your school has K-12 students enrolled and generates 26 tons or more of food scraps per year AND is located within 20 miles of an authorized facility that processes food scraps, such as a composting or anaerobic digestion facility, you need to comply with the Commercial Organics Recycling law effective July 1, 2026.



If you are triggered by the organics recycling law you should consider conducting a waste audit of your school to determine where and how much food scraps are generated, as Public Act 24-45 focuses on all the food scraps generated in the school building, not just in the cafeteria.

There are also calculators to help you estimate the amount of food scraps generated from schools per student for lunch [Center for Ecotechnology \(CET\)](#) and breakfast estimates can be calculated using generation data from [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#).

Determining if Your School is Within 20 miles of an Authorized Facility?

CT DEEP has created a map of authorized facilities that process food scraps, which includes showing a 20-mile radius around them.

Click on the map: [Food Residual Recycling](#)

On the upper left corner, write in your school's address.

If your school is within a circle, that means your school is triggered by the 20-mile radius.

Waste Sort vs Waste Audit

A waste audit of the entire school can be helpful to learn how many materials could be collected for recycling or composting, as well as identify what items could be reduced, or reused instead of placing in the trash.

Waste sorts could also be conducted. Waste sorts are less comprehensive and can give you snapshot of a portion of your waste, for example a waste sort of the cafeteria.

A waste audit is a comprehensive study of where waste is generated including what type and how much. If your school has a large enrollment, serves breakfast and lunch, has a kitchen, and may be a culinary classroom, you will likely generate 26 tons or more of food scraps. It may be beneficial to conduct more than a food sort in the cafeteria.

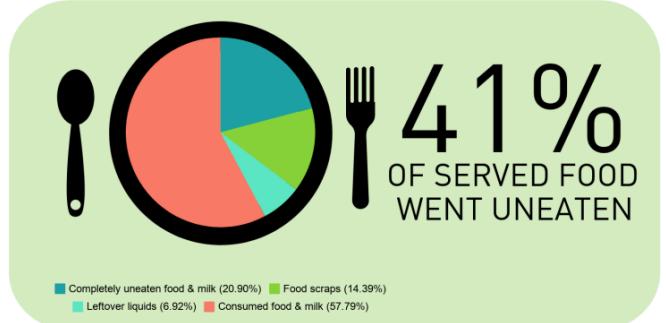
Schools that have conducted waste audits of the school or a waste sort in the cafeteria are often surprised by how much food students do not consume, the quantity of milk cartons, or that food scraps are generated in more than just the cafeteria. A waste audit or sort can also determine the amount of untouched edible food that is currently tossed that could be part of a sharing table program or donated to a community group.

Sandoval Elementary School Breakfast Food Waste

Seven Generations Ahead conducted a breakfast waste audit at Sandoval Elementary School on May 8, 2018. Sandoval has 965 students in pre-kindergarten through 5th grade.

How much food waste does Sandoval produce at breakfast

In just one day, there were 468 food items [130 lbs] that went completely uneaten by students. There was an additional 107 lbs of uneaten food scraps.



Link to [Resources](#) for how to conduct a waste audit, waste sort and other resources for a more sustainable school cafeteria.

Note - what can be recycled or composted in Connecticut might differ from other states.

How to Start a Food Scrap Collection Program in Your School Cafeteria

Food scraps, like trash, can be heavy and costly to manage. In addition, composting and anaerobic digestion are great ways to manage food scraps, but like recycling, waste prevention and reuse are preferred methods for managing this material.

According to the EPA's Wasted Food Scale, we first should be preventing food waste. Reuse of food is referred to as food recovery, or rescuing food. Food that can be "reused" is food that is still safe and nutritious for people, but perhaps slightly damaged or otherwise unsellable/ less desired. This includes excess and surplus food from the school kitchen or cafeteria.

Another option for reuse of food is to use it for feeding animals when the food is not as desirable for humans, but still safe and nutritious for animals. The next highest use of un-wanted or un-edible food is composting and anaerobic digestion, which still allows some of the "value" of food to be captured and are better options over disposing of food in the trash.

Sending down the drain is equivalent to sending to a landfill or incinerator.

Need Some Inspiration?

[Green Lunchroom Challenge: Prevent & Reduce Food Waste at Your Facility](#)

Provides examples of food waste prevention, reduction and diversion efforts at K-12 schools! Check them out and consider emulating these efforts at your school!



Whether you're thinking about your individual school, or at a district level, each school may have its own specific needs or approach to collect materials for recycling and/or composting. And while you may save money with strong negotiations with your trash, recycling and food scrap contracts, it's important to recognize reducing food waste, setting up sharing tables, donating surplus food and collecting food scraps for composting in your school(s) also models good behavior that helps young people see the value of protecting the environment, conserving resources and also complying with the law.

Schools and/or districts are encouraged to [Form a Green Team](#), to work with staff from different parts of the school.

Link to [Resources](#) for more information on how to collect food scraps from your school.

Districts/Boards of Education

It is important to understand the roles of custodial staff and teachers, including their current duties, including union contracts, when making changes to school procedures or work duties. Large-scale purchasing of collection containers or other equipment at the district level could save time and money.



It's possible only one or a few schools within your district are triggered by Public Act 24-45, however, there is efficiency of scale. It may be more cost effective to develop food rescue programs and collect food scraps from all schools within your district. Business offices may also want to connect with the [municipal recycling coordinator](#) to understand what types of programs are being offered for residents to learn if there are any additional cost saving opportunities.

Don't forget to incorporate waste reduction and reuse into your sustainable materials management plans, which may off-set costs.

Working at the district level can provide a number of important benefits:

- Ability to negotiate better contracts.
- Provides consistency throughout students' academic careers.
- Increases efficiency of a school's recycling, food donation and/or food scrap collection program
- Encourages recycling, composting, and trash contracts through competition.
- Provides opportunities for environmental education.
- Utilizes increased purchasing power; take advantage of [state contracts](#) with The CT Department of Administrative Services (DAS)

For School Business Officials

As a school business official, you may be responsible for negotiating waste management contracts that include trash, recycling, food recovery, and food scraps hauling for your school district or campus.

When you contract with a waste hauler, they are responsible for picking up your materials outside the school, but it is up to you and your maintenance and facility staff to collect materials from inside the building, which includes needing a budget for bins inside the school.

This is likely the same collecting food scraps, but if you're working with a food recovery organization, they may need access to the school kitchen. Learn more about [donating surplus food](#).

Forming a Green Team

Why a Green Team? Green teams bring together staff from all parts of a school to brainstorm, plan and carry out projects that further the sustainability goals of the school. A Green Team can identify challenges and opportunities for improving waste management practices and addressing other environmental impacts related to students, staff, school buildings and its grounds. Green Teams are about continuous improvement.

[Green Schools Initiative: Tips for Starting Your Green Team](#)

Contracting: Waste, Recycling, Food Scrap Haulers and Food Recovery Organizations

The power and control over services and costs, as well as cost savings are within the contract with your local waste and recycling hauler(s). Trash disposal and recycling are often collected by the same hauler, but with two separate trucks, collecting from two separate dumpsters.



It is against the law to commingle recyclables with trash – not only for the hauler, but within your school buildings and grounds too. Contracts for food scrap collection and/or food donation services, like other types of contracts, have room for negotiation.

Contracts to collect food scraps and/or food donation services should be incorporated into your school budget as separate line items or existing waste contracts if your current waste/recycling hauler provides those services.

Many schools that have already implemented food scrap collection programs have a cost for hauling food scraps, but also avoided cost associated with trash disposal – because trash can be picked up less frequently and/or it's not as heavy if you pay a tipping fee separate from your hauling fee.

What are Sharing Tables and How to Set Them Up

The concept of sharing tables is to allow students to put aside their unopened cheese sticks, milk, fruit cups, apple slices, etc. for other students or teachers to take for themselves.

Share tables can be a box that is then brought to a refrigerator after the lunch period, or some schools buy small fridges, preferably with glass doors; food is refrigerated, and students can see food available for them to take.



Share tables not only reduce food waste, but the USDA views them as ways to encourage students to consume nutritious foods.

Setting up sharing tables may not work for all schools. Allergies amongst the student population is a real concern, which may prevent elementary schools from creating sharing tables, and so sharing tables may be more appropriate for middle schools and high schools.

- [Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs | Food and Nutrition Service \(USDA\)](#)
- [Food Donation By Connecticut Schools \(CET\)](#)

If you Don't Share, then Donate!

Donating Excess or Surplus Food

Having excess or surplus food cannot be avoided in school and commercial food service settings. However, donating excess or surplus food ensures food prepared will be consumed.

It is both safe and legal to donate surplus food to local pantries, soup kitchens and community groups. This includes food that is past its freshness date.

It's also safe and legal to donate surplus or excess food from the school kitchen or cafeteria to any Culinary Arts Programs at your school or within your school district. Often these programs have to purchase their own food with their own budget and would benefit from additional food.

Connecticut Food Donation Legal Fact Sheets

- [Connecticut Food Donation: Date Labeling Laws](#)
- [Connecticut Food Donation: Liability Protections](#)
- [Connecticut Food Donation: Tax Incentives for Businesses](#)
- [Connecticut Food Donation: Feeding Food Scraps to Animals](#)



Food recovery can be conducted by staff and volunteers in the school, to transport surplus food to a local food pantry or community group.

**Willing to self-haul excess food from your school?
Find a local food pantry in your community:
[CT Food Share](#)**

However, when that's not feasible, there are a number of organizations that provide this service in your community.

FOOD RECOVERY ORGANIZATIONS

- [Food Rescue US](#) – works in Fairfield County, Hartford, Litchfield and looking for new partners.
- [Haven's Harvest](#) – works in Greater New Haven, Oxford region, New London and looking for new partners.

FOOD SCRAP HAULERS

Collecting food scraps is different than collecting recyclables or trash. Materials are often heavy and very wet. Some haulers only work with larger commercial businesses and pick-up compactors of food scraps like at a grocery store. Schools can approach their current trash/recycling hauler to learn if they also collect food scraps. If not, there are many haulers who specialize in smaller pickups, collecting carts of food scraps at businesses and schools in different sections of Connecticut.

- [Businesses that collect food scraps for composting in Connecticut](#)

Animal Feed: Alternative to Food Scraps to Composters

Beyond food waste prevention and addressing human hunger, the EPA's Wasted Food Scale emphasizes a third key aspect: feeding animals. This leads us to the realm of animal farms and animal feed manufactures that upcycle food scraps.

It's important to understand that when collecting food scraps for animal feed, paper, plastic or anything besides food scraps as well as meat, bones or fish are not wanted and can harm the animals and the farmers livelihood.



How to find a local piggery? [Secchiaroli Farm](#) in Waterford partners with a number of businesses and colleges and may be looking for new partners. There may be a local pig/animal farm in your in your community. Have a farmer's market? Ask local farmer if they would take food scraps from your school.

In addition, Connecticut is home to [Bright Feeds](#), an animal feed manufacturer that uses food waste to make feed for poultry, swine, aquaculture and dairy feeding operations.



Doolittle School, Cheshire

Food barrels, buckets and carts: Number, Size and Placement

Where to place and how many containers you need inside your school and/or around your school grounds to collect food scraps is important to consider. If your school is triggered by Public Act 24-45, collection of food scraps is more than the cafeteria. Food scraps need to be collected where they are generated.

To determine how many and the types of collection bins needed in your school, look to where you currently generate food waste. Also consider *who* is putting food scraps in the bin; younger children may need shorter containers. In addition to the cafeteria, food scrap bins may also be

needed in the kitchen, staff lounge, classrooms where students eat snacks and/or breakfast and culinary classrooms.

Suggested locations for food scrap bins:

Teacher Lounges – bucket food scraps

Classrooms – bin for food scraps if snacks or breakfast are eaten in the classroom;

Cafeteria Waste – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables, bin for food scraps, bin for liquids, area to stack trays, area for washable utensils, consider collection for food donation if there is excess food;

Culinary Classrooms – bin for trash, bin for mixed recyclables, bin for food scraps, consider collection for food donation if there is excess food;

Outdoor Gym – bin for food scraps if food is consumed in the area; and

Playground and Sport Fields – bin for food scraps if food is consumed in the area.

Where to Purchase Barrels, Buckets and Carts

Include provisions for collection containers in your waste, recycling and/or food scraps hauling contract(s). If that can't be negotiated, then the school will need to purchase containers themselves.

The size and quantity of indoor and outdoor containers will be dependent on the size of your school and the provisions in your contract.

Any janitorial supply company will also have a range of trash and recycling bins, including some with wheels – you may save money if you purchase through a DAS state contract.



Cider Mill Hill Elementary School, Wilton



School in West Hartford

What about cafeteria sorting stations? Where Can They be Purchased?

Sorting stations vary. Some use regular trash bins or carts, perhaps along with thin tables. Others are made by parents or technical high school students.

Check out this resource from Vermont that showcases a number of different sorting stations for the cafeteria.

[Cafeteria Sorting Stations at public schools within CVSWMD](#)

Outdoor Bins for Collecting Food Scraps

A number of companies who manufacture outdoor containers for trash and/or recyclables now design containers to collect food scraps. It's unclear if these would work best for schools or not, but it is important to be aware of the new technology that keeps emerging for food scrap collection.

[metroSTOR](#)
[BigBelly](#)
[Busch Systems](#)

Are You Collecting the Right Materials in Your Food Scrap Bins?

The answer to this question depends on who is accepting your food scraps. Are you sending your food scraps to an aerobic composting facility, an anaerobic digestion facility, a piggery or animal feed manufacturing or a small community farm?

There are some basic items that all compost facilities will accept.

FOOD SCRAPS

Please keep **NON**-food scrap items out of your food scraps.

| Acceptable Food Scraps | Food Packaging or Trash | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| Yes | No | | | | |
|  Meat & poultry (bones OK)  Rice & grains  Dairy products  Nuts & seeds |  Fruits & vegetables (no stickers)  Leftover & spoiled food  Egg shells |  Fish & shellfish (shells OK)  Chips & snacks  Bread & pasta  Tea bags (no staples)  Coffee grounds |  Take Out Containers  Plastic Bottles  Clothing or rags  Aluminium Cans |  Plastic or compostable utensils  Glass of any kind  Pet waste  Plastic wrap |  Napkins & paper towels  Diapers  Metal & aluminum Foil  Juice or milk boxes |

These **ARE** food scraps.

These **ARE NOT** food scraps.

Note, animal feed operations, especially piggeries do not want any paper products or packaging. Anaerobic digestion facilities may accept liquid waste. Find out if they would accept your fats, oil, greases from the kitchen and/or milk/juice from the cafeteria.

Aerobic composting facilities will often accept some paper products.

Best thing to do is ask for a “What’s IN, What’s OUT” list from your composter to ensure you’re collecting the right materials and keeping everything else out of the bin!

Where Do Food Scraps Go?

Connecticut has a growing number of authorized facilities that can process food scraps. While a 20-mile radius determines if your school is triggered by Public Act 24-45, it does not state which facility to bring your food scraps.

If you have compostable trays, for example, you may find the closest facilities are not willing to accept paper products with food scraps. You will need to find a facility that can accommodate your program – or you may need to alter what you collect to follow the guidance documents of the facility.

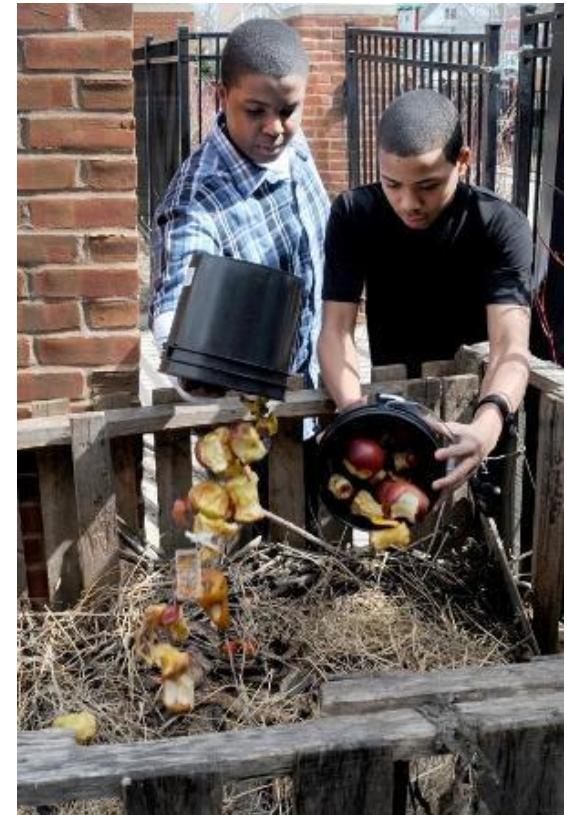
You may transport your food scraps to facilities in Rhode Island, Massachusetts or New York. You may also develop partnerships with piggeries (pig farm that feeds food scraps to their animals), local farm compost operation, or Bright Feeds (manufacture animal feed from food scraps). Find authorized compost sites [here](#).

Composting Food Scraps On-Site at Your School

Composting on-site isn’t for everyone, but the experience can be educational, reduces costs associated with hauling food scraps and all finished compost is available for your school garden or the broader community.

The Department supports on-site school composting if basic protocols are followed, including having enough bulky or carbonaceous materials (i.e. leaves), no complaints come in about animals being attracted to the compost system and the school only composts food scraps generated in their school.

- [Getting Started with School Composting \(VT ANR\)](#)
- [A Guide to Starting a Composting Program in Your School, 2010 \(Green Mountain Farm to School, VT\)](#)
- [LaSalle \(Chicago\) digs into onsite composting and slashes food waste \(Seven Generations Ahead\)](#)
- [Guide to Composting Onsite at Schools, 2018 \(Institute for Local Self-Reliance\)](#)
- [School Composting: A Manual for Connecticut Schools \(pdf\) \(Town of Mansfield, Connecticut\)](#)



Barnard Environmental Science and Technology School, New Haven



To the left, Greenwich High School, Greenwich



Worm Composting

Composting with worms can become a school-wide activity involving mid to large scale vermicomposting systems.

However, many schools have classroom worm bins to eat snacks and lunch scraps and used as a learning tool.

- [Worm Composting Basics](#) (Cornell University)
- [Vermicomposting for Schools](#) (North Carolina University Extension)
- [VIDEO: Large Scale Vermicomposting](#) (Urban Worm Company)

- [Mid-Scale Vermicomposting of Lunchroom Wastes](#) by Binet Payne
- [The Worm Guide - A Vermicomposting Guide for Teachers](#), 2004 (CA Integrated Waste Management Board)
- [Vermicomposting \(Grades 3-5\)](#) (Ag in the Classroom)
- [Composting Institutional Food Scraps with Worms](#) (Middletown, 2010)

Resources: Waste Prevention ideas, Waste Audits, Waste Sorts, Setting Up Food Scrap Recycling Program

Waste Prevention Ideas

- Reduce packaging waste by encouraging parents and students to pack lunches and snacks in reusable plastic containers and lunchboxes.
- Replace single-use disposable lunch trays with reusable ones.
- Replace single-use utensils with reusable ones.
- Consider a milk dispenser instead of individual milk cartons.

Single use items, such as polystyrene (aka Styrofoam) or compostable trays may provide an easy to manage food tray, but studies have found that reusable trays are both healthier for students to eat off of (steel) and better for the environment by reducing consumption of water, energy and raw materials.



School in Greenwich

If your school does buy single-use trays, please make sure they are PFAS free and if you seek compostable trays, make sure they are BPI certified.

- [Ditching Disposables Toolkit](#) (Center for Environmental Health)
- [GreenScreen Certified Standard for Reusable Food Packaging, Food Service ware & Cookware](#) (Center for Environmental Health)
- [Sort 2 Save Kit: Service Learning in the Cafeteria](#) (Cafeteria Culture)
- [Plastic Free Restaurants](#) – subsidizes purchases of reusables to replace single use plastic items in the cafeteria - for restaurants and schools
- [Reusable Food ware Purchasing Guide – 2024](#) (Upstream)
- [Food Waste Reduction Toolkit for Rhode Island Schools](#)
- [Food Waste Reduction Toolkit for Illinois Schools - Seven Generations Ahead](#)
- [NJ School Food Waste Reduction Toolkit](#) (Rutgers University Dept. of Family & Community Health Sciences)
- VIDEO [Gleaning for our Culinary Classroom](#) (Yellow Farmhouse)

Guides and Resources to Conduct Waste Audits and Waste Sorts

- [Eco-Schools USA Consumption and Waste Audit](#) (National Wildlife Federation)
- [StopWaste School Waste Audit Resources](#) (Stop Waste)
- [Zero Waste Schools — Waste Free Greenwich](#)
- [CT Schools Reuse Revolution — Waste Free Greenwich](#)
- [Sandoval Food Waste Audit – Breakfast and Lunch](#), May 2018 (Chicago)
- [Guide to Conducting Student Food Waste Audits: A Resource for Schools](#) – 2017 (EPA)
- VIDEOS: [School Sorting Videos](#) (Stop Waste)

Resource Guides for Reducing, Sharing, Donating and Collecting Food Scraps at Schools

- [Connecticut Food Donation Made Easy](#) (CET)
- [Food Donation By Connecticut Schools](#) (CET)
- [Food Scraps Diversion Guide – West Hartford Public School](#) (CET)
- [Food for Thought: Choosing Between Feeding Animals, Anaerobic Digestion & Composting in Connecticut](#) (CET)
- [Cafeteria Recycling & Organics Collection Set-Up Guide and Handbook](#) (New York City)
- [Cafeteria Sorting Station Design Concepts at CVSWMD Member Schools](#) (CVSWMD)
- VIDEO: [School Cafeteria Food Scrap Composting: How Does It Work?](#) (2:26) (OCRRA)
- [Food Scrap Recycling Program – Greenwich Public Schools](#), 2023-2024 (Zero Waste Schools)
- [Guidance Document – Preventing Food Waste in the School Kitchen Setting](#) (Washington County, Oregon)

Other Resources

- [Green Schools Initiative: Tips for Starting Your Green Team](#)
- [Food Waste Warriors \(World Wildlife Fund\)](#)
- All CET Resources: [Wasted Food assistance in Connecticut • CET](#)

Looking for classroom activities? Return to DEEP's main [School Recycling and Composting](#) webpage and search for *School Classroom Activities & Resources* in the toolkit