



Reducing the Climate Impact of School Food Waste

NJ Clean Air Council Annual Public Meeting

April 16, 2024

Véronique Lambert
Schools Program Manager
Sustainable Jersey
lambertv@tcnj.edu

Agenda

- Impacts of Food Waste
- Addressing Food Waste in NJ Schools
- How do we change current practice in the school sector to bring about significant climate gas reductions? / Practices to Reduce Food Waste
- Driving implementation of food waste reduction practices
- Recommendations to advance this work

From Cafeteria to Waste

30 to 40 percent of the U.S. food supply, ends up as food waste

- Schools in the US waste over 1 billion pounds of food each year
- In a 2021 study of 3 NJ schools, the average food waste per school was 20,700 pounds per year



“Food waste has profound environmental consequences” (ReFed 2023)

- In 2022, surplus food contributed 6.1% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to driving 86 million passenger vehicles – more than the registered cars in California, Texas, Florida, and New York combined – for a year (ReFed, 2023).
- Nearly 60% of all landfill emissions of methane (a potent greenhouse gas) is from food waste (EPA)
- The land, water, labor, energy and other inputs used in producing, processing, transporting, preparing, storing, and disposing of discarded food is wasted

Social & Economic Impacts of Food Waste

- Wasted food could be used to feed families in need. Over 175,000 children in NJ experienced food insecurity in 2020 (NJDOH)
- Getting rid of food waste costs money



Sustainable Jersey for Schools

A free, voluntary program that provides tools, training, and grants to New Jersey public schools to help them implement sustainability initiatives and achieve certification.



- Identifies **actions** to become more sustainable – including food waste actions
- Provides **tools, resources, and guidance** to make progress
- Provides **grants** for schools and school districts to implement sustainability initiatives
- Recognizes schools that complete a balanced portfolio of sustainability actions with **certification**

School Food Waste: Responding to Changes in Environment and School Interest



In 2015, the first-ever national food loss and waste goal in the United States was launched, calling for a 50% reduction by 2030.



In 2017, the first Food Waste legislation in New Jersey was passed.

Bill S3027: NJ will reduce its Municipal Solid Food Waste by 50% by 2030.

Bill A306: First ever Food Waste guidelines for schools in NJ.



Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification and grant applications demonstrate interest in addressing school food waste.

NJDEP grant funded project 2021-2023 to pilot and develop toolkit and actions.

Food Waste Study at 3 NJ Schools

Sustainable Jersey with *Rutgers Cooperative Extension*

- Combined enrollment of 1,750 students
- Before food waste reduction interventions: **62,150 pounds** of food waste from the school lunch program in a school year.
- After food waste reduction interventions:
 - **34,036 pounds** of food waste in a school year – 45% reduction
 - 31,680 pounds of food waste was composted (92% of waste)
 - 21,300 pounds of unopened food items diverted to share tables
 - 207,720 pounds of CO₂eq avoided (21 cars off the road for one year)

Practices to Reduce School Food Waste

- Educate students about the value of food and the impacts of food waste
- Train food service staff on practices to reduce food waste
- Capture uneaten food for share tables and donation
- Separate food waste and divert it from the waste stream
- Use compost to improve school gardens

Educate Students About Food



Food Waste Audit

- A great education tool!
- Items leftover on individual food trays were separated by food group and weighed at the end of each lunch period.

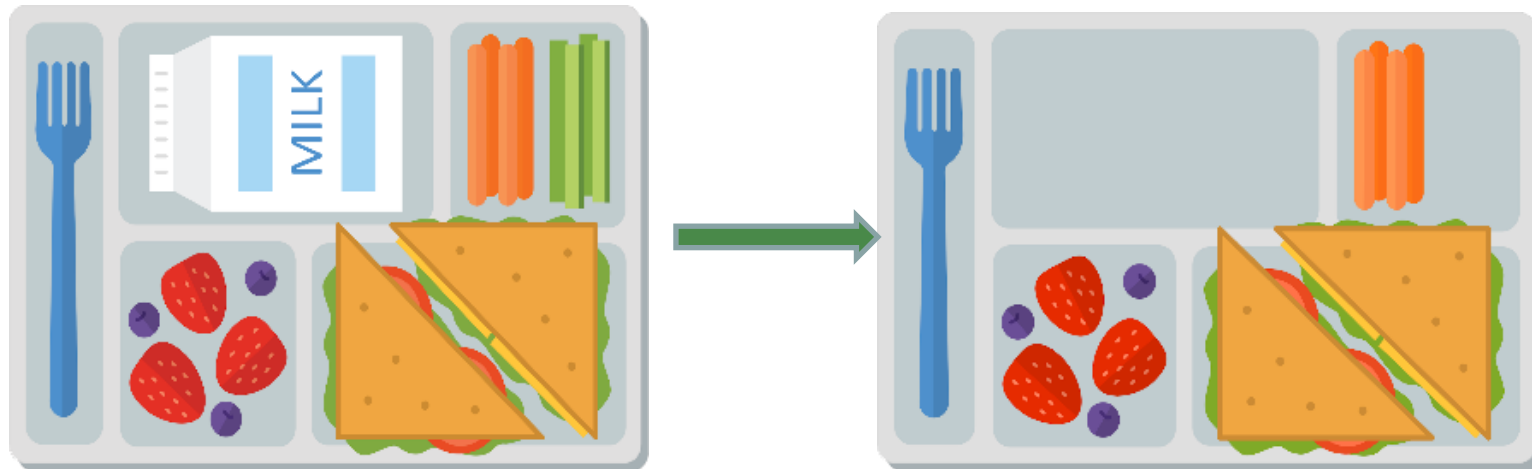


Train Food Service Staff

Offer vs Serve

USDA Guidelines allow students to **DECLINE** some of the food. School is reimbursed for a meal if a student takes:

- 3 or 4 of the 5 components offered for lunch
- Fruit **or** vegetable



Food Service Interventions



Make cafeteria
environment more
appealing

Take note of which hot
entrees are most
favorable amongst
students

Offer additional
seasonings or
condiments for students
to add flavor

Offer pre-cut or sliced
fresh fruits instead of
fruit cups

Use a milk dispenser
instead of offering
cartons of milk

Offer $\frac{1}{2}$ portions of
sandwiches and pre-
assembled bagels

Prepare meals in smaller
batches to prevent
overproduction of food

School Policy Interventions



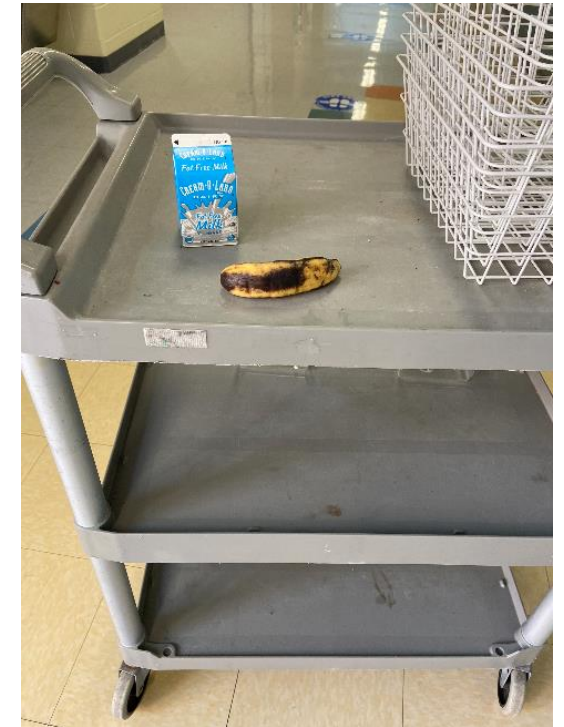
- Increase time allocated to lunch
- Schedule recess before lunch

Food Recovery - Share Tables & Donation

Schools set up a share table or a food donation program to feed hungry students or community members with recovered excess food rather than throwing it out.



Food Recovery – Feed Hungry Kids



Divert Food Waste from Waste Stream



What can be turned into compost at DMS?



- **ALL FOOD**
- **Even bones**
- **NO PLASTIC PACKAGING**

We will also remove liquid from the waste stream!



- **ALL liquid will be placed in the labeled pail, next to the compost bin**
- **ALL milk cartons will be recycled with the other single stream recyclables**



Composting Begins Delran Middle School

May 1, 2022



Food Waste Warriors direct their classmates how to properly sort their food waste, recyclables and trash.

Recycle/Compost: On or Off-Site



Use Compost in Gardens



The Value of Food: Community Connections



Driving Implementation of Food Waste Reduction Practices

- Actions and toolkit through the *Sustainable Jersey for Schools* program
- Training and Education are key components

Actions To Reduce School Food Waste

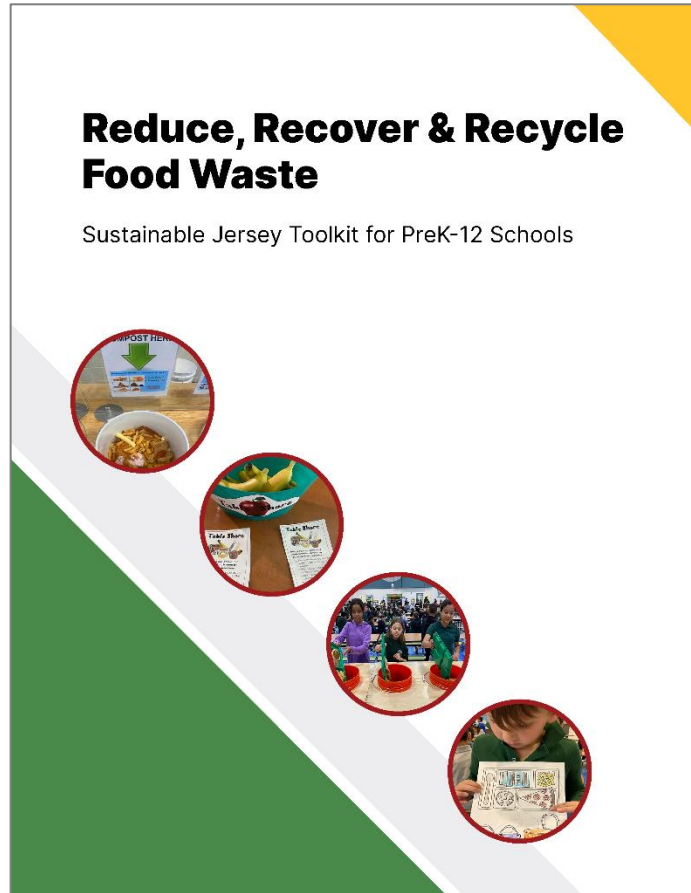
The *Sustainable Jersey for Schools* program offers guidance and incentives to complete these actions – schools earn points toward the 150 points needed for certification.

- **Waste Audit 10-20 points**
- **Campaign To Reduce School Food Waste 10 points**
- **Food Recovery - Share Tables & Donation 10-20 points**
- **Food Service Training & Best Practices to Reduce Food Waste 10 points**
- **Food Waste Recycling/Composting 15 points**

View all actions at: <https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/actions/>

Reduce, Recover & Recycle Food Waste

Sustainable Jersey Toolkit for PreK-12 Schools



<https://bit.ly/FoodWasteToolkit>

Outreach & Training

- Peer to peer learning among schools
- Sessions and exhibits at state-wide conferences
- Webinars
- Ongoing staff support for schools



Certification

Actions

Grants

Events

Resources

Get Involved

> **Green Team Resources**

▼ **Presentations**

Webinar Recordings

Webinar Recordings & Presentations

To further assist you in the certification process, we have provided links to previous webinar recordings and presentations that supply information relevant to all aspects of our program. If you were unable to attend one of our online presentations, this is a

Waste Reduction & Recycling

Food Waste Actions - New & Updated

November 2023

- [View Recording](#)
- [Download Presentation](#)

<https://www.sustainablejerseyschools.com/resources/presentations/webinar-recordings/#c3612>

Recommendations to Advance This Work

- Clarify and strengthen guidance on schools implementing share tables and serving as food banks.
- Facilitate schools handling their own food waste within a district with supportive regulation and funding.
- Increase options for sending food waste to external recycling facilities.



Thank You!

Questions?

Véronique Lambert
Sustainable Jersey
lambertv@tcnj.edu