



**Food Waste
Warriors** 

HOW TO

Conduct a Food Waste Audit

AT YOUR SCHOOL!

**A GUIDE CREATED FOR EDUCATORS, PARENTS, PARTNERS,
AND WHOMEVER WOULD LIKE TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE IN
K-12 SCHOOLS.**

Why conduct a food waste audit?

A FOOD WASTE AUDIT HELPS IDENTIFY THE TYPES AND AMOUNTS OF FOOD WASTE GENERATED, PROVIDING VALUABLE DATA TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES THAT REDUCE WASTE.

The US wastes an estimated 30-40% of its food, while more than 41 million Americans face hunger, including nearly 13 million children. At the same time, wasting food wastes inputs like water, land usage, energy, money, and labor; and can lead to harmful impacts for wildlife and their natural habitats.



What is “Food Waste Warriors”?

Food Waste Warriors is a WWF program established in 2018 with the mission to reduce food waste in K-12 schools across the country by encouraging lasting behavior changes in students. FWW has been implemented in 600+ schools in 31 US states.

WHAT WE DO:

- **Provide open-source food waste curricula for K-12 students**
- **Advocate for evidence-based solutions in schools**
 - » Ex. longer lunch periods, lunch after recess, composting, offer vs. serve, share tables, bulk milk dispensers, donation programs, adapting recipes to match student preferences and cultures, etc.
- **Leverage policy change at local, state, and federal levels**
- **Empower students, teachers, and staff to improve the sustainability of their school system**

For more information, click [here](#).

Steps to Getting Started

1 GET PERMISSION

Working with schools and kids can be daunting, but it doesn't have to be! The first thing you'll need to do before planning for your food waste audit is get permission from the school administration and to make sure the cafeteria staff are informed. See an example of an email you can send to the principal to get the process started:

Dear [Principal's Name],

I am the parent of [Student's Name] and am reaching out to ask for permission to conduct a food waste audit at [School Name] during lunch hours this coming month. This is part of World Wildlife Fund's Food Waste Warriors program which you can learn more about [here](#). The goal of the audit is to assess how much food is being discarded to make the first step in exploring ways to reduce waste within school settings. The audit would only involve students who eat school lunch and would only affect how students would dispose of food during the lunch period.

I will bring all necessary materials with me and would just ask for a few minutes towards the end of each lunch period to explain the audit to students. My goal is to raise awareness and encourage mindful waste practices without disrupting your school's lunch routine!

Please let me know if this would be possible, if there are any volunteering forms I need to fill out beforehand, and if you would be able to connect me to the cafeteria manager to make sure we can all be on the same page! I am happy to discuss this opportunity further at your convenience.

*Best,
[Your Name + Contact Info]*



Steps to Getting Started (cont'd)

2 SET DATE AND TIME

Depending on the size of school you're working with, school lunch could last 2-3 hours. Make sure to clarify:

- (1) the date of the audit
- (2) the time the lunch starts so you can arrive 30 minutes early to set up
- (3) how many lunch periods there will be, and
- (4) the best point of contact in the school and cafeteria.

3 GATHER YOUR MATERIALS

- 4-5 5-Gallon Buckets
- 4-5 Labels for Buckets (Fruit, Vegetable, Milk, Entree, Other)
- Bag Lining for Buckets
- Gloves
- Scales
- Cleaning Supplies
- Data Collection Sheet
- Writing Utensil(s)
- Plastic Tarp (optional)
- Spatula (optional)
- Clipboard (optional)



Before Lunch Begins

4 CHECK-IN AT THE FRONT DESK (5MIN)

Try to be at the school at least 30 minutes before the start of lunch so you have time to set up the cafeteria, take initial weights, introduce yourself to kitchen staff, and get acquainted with the lunchroom, meal for today, and general lunchroom procedures.

5 SET UP (10 MIN)

Create a sorting station in the cafeteria:

- Put buckets on top of plastic tarp
- Label the 5 buckets
- Add bag inserts to buckets
- Set up a table or area for packaged food that hasn't been opened



HOT TIP!

Put the buckets in front of the trash cans. Making a physical 'barrier' will remind students to sort their waste first!

6 TAKE INITIAL WEIGHTS (15 MIN)

Fill out the first three columns on the data sheet. You will need to ask the cafeteria manager for permission to weigh one serving of each of the foods without their packaging (ex. Take the baby carrots out of the plastic wrap and weigh them on the scale to get X. Do this for each food item. If there are multiple vegetables offered, you could take the average weight of the servings).

During Lunch

7 MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT

After everyone has sat down to eat and before people start throwing their lunch away, it is best to make a lunchroom announcement. Some schools have microphones, other times teachers will help you quiet the lunchroom down so you can make a quick announcement. Announcement could be something like this:

Hi everyone! I'm [Name]. Some of you have already noticed, so I wanted to address how the lunchroom looks a little bit different today. Today is a special day because your school is collecting information about the food in the cafeteria.

If you brought your lunch from home, you will proceed as usual to the trash cans to throw out your food waste as you normally do. However, if you are eating school lunch, you're going to sort your food waste into their respective buckets. There will be a bucket for fruit, vegetable, entree, and milk. The important thing to remember is that we are only throwing food into the buckets—not our trays, our cartons, our plastic wrap, etc. Only food. I will be here to help you as well as some of your teachers.



8 SORT FOOD WASTE

This is the messy part! Be sure to use gloves and the scraper to help sort the food. Recruiting a few lunch aides to help with the cause will help the audit move along smoothly and quickly.

Do your best to take note of the food that hasn't been opened yet and that the packaging doesn't make its way into the buckets. You can put unopened waste on a separate table and use those foods to fill out the last column on the data sheet.

After Lunch

9 WEIGHTS

Take weights of the buckets after the lunch window is over and fill out the remaining columns in the data sheet.

10 CLEAN UP

Use paper towels, rags, etc. to clean up any spills. Spill out the liquid food waste (milk) into the drain. Dispose of the solid food waste in the buckets either by composting them or throwing them away in the larger trash cans (whatever method the school currently has in place).

11 CHECK OUT

Thank everyone for their help and participation! You've just facilitated a school food waste audit with a little help from your friends.

12 OPTIONAL: LOG RESULTS IN KNACK DATABASE

After you've filled out the data sheet, we ask that you add the information into our **Knack Database**. This is a national database that holds food waste audit data from hundreds of schools across the country. Inputting your food waste audit results will help us keep track of school food waste data in schools across the country to push for district-level changes as well as state- and national-level policy change.

Now What?

After conducting a food waste audit, you might be surprised by just how much uneaten food your school cafeteria produces each day. It can be eye-opening to see the numbers, and it may leave you wondering, “Now what?” The good news is that there are several practical next steps you can explore to reduce waste and make your cafeteria more sustainable!

IDEAS ON HOW TO CHANGE SYSTEMS WITHIN YOUR SCHOOL TO REDUCE FOOD WASTE:

- Consider the feasibility of setting up a share table, where unopened and untouched food items can be safely offered to others
- Look into Offer vs. Serve policies that give students more choice and reduce unwanted food on trays
- Explore composting, food sorting stations, or even rearranging the schedule to have recess before lunch, which can increase appetites and reduce waste
- Switch to bulk milk dispensers to cut down on single-use cartons

Each school is different, so finding the right combination of solutions starts with understanding your data and getting creative with the next steps.



Were you able to conduct a food waste audit and want to talk about what your next steps might look like? Feel free to reach out to fwwstaff@wwf.org.