

Excerpts from RI's State School Waste Recycling and Refuse Disposal Law:

§23-18.9-17. Food Waste Ban.

On and after January 1, 2023, each **educational entity** and each covered educational institution shall ensure that the **organic-waste materials** that are generated by the covered entity or at the covered educational facility **are recycled** at an authorized, **composting facility or anaerobic digestion facility or by another authorized recycling method** if: (1) The educational entity generates not less than thirty (30) tons per year of organic-waste material; and, (2) The educational entity is located not more than fifteen (15) miles from an authorized, composting facility or anaerobic digestion facility with available capacity to accept such material.

§16-110-5. Food donations.

It shall be the policy of the state, the department of education and any **educational entity** to **donate any unserved nonperishable or unspoiled perishable food** to local food banks or the Rhode Island Food Bank in accordance with the guidelines from the Rhode Island Department of Health "The Rhode to End Hunger" initiative.

- Educational entity = school district
- All school districts in RI, except the six smallest, produce more than 30 tons of food waste each year.

For more information visit our website and sign up for our newsletter to hear more about our program for your school.

rirecyclingclub.org

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As of January 2023, most RI schools are required to divert food waste and recover surplus food at their schools.

(See the inside panel for the RI law.)

Our project, **Get Food Smart, RI**, aims to help those schools succeed.



Food waste is a huge problem in need of solutions.

- A whopping 35-40% of food produced in the US is wasted and most of it ends up in landfills.
- 1 in 3 Rhode Islanders is food insecure.
- Food waste in landfills creates methane gas, a greenhouse gas many times more powerful than CO2.
- When we waste food, we also waste all the energy and water it takes to grow, harvest, transport, and package it.

RI School Recycling Project assessment of wasted food in RI public schools:

In 2019, we conducted 15 comprehensive Food Scrap Audits in 3 school districts (urban, suburban & rural) to measure how much food was being wasted each day at lunch in our elementary, middle & high schools.

We extrapolated the data to estimate how much food is being wasted in individual schools, entire school districts and all of Rhode Island over the course of the school year; measurements that can inform schools as they develop strategies to reduce the amount of food waste sent to the landfill.

Food Smart schools have reduced the amount of cafeteria trash going to the landfill by 86%.

Findings

- Approximately **2,500 tons** of food waste are sent to the landfill every year by RI public schools.
- **388 tons of that are perfectly good untouched, unopened food**—fruit, milk, carrots, cheese, juice, etc. that could be redistributed to those who are food insecure.
- **Wasted food represents 79% of the total waste** coming out of the 15 lunchrooms audited.

What's happening right now?

Students dump their trays into a single garbage bin, filling trash bags with everything on their trays. The school custodians fill the dumpsters with these trash bags, to be hauled away to the Johnston Landfill. Edible, uneaten food, compostable food scraps, liquids, and recyclable items all end up in the trash. **This is happening every day in almost every school in Rhode Island.**

With funding from the US EPA, the USDA, 11th Hour Racing/The Schmidt Family Foundation, and the City of Providence, the **RI School Recycling Project** is helping schools reduce their food waste. **Get Food Smart, RI** is a project that engages students in reducing, recovering, and composting wasted food.

The project is in 15 schools in Providence, North Providence, Cranston, Cumberland, and Smithfield, with 10 more launching in the next year. Student Rangers and Captains are taking leadership roles, supervising “sorting stations” where they show fellow students how to sort waste from their lunch trays.

**GET
FOOD SMART
RHODE ISLAND**

How we sort cafeteria waste:

1. **Share Table:** For food that is still edible to share with hungry students and families that face food insecurity.
2. **Liquids Bucket:** Rather than trucking heavy liquids to the landfill, unfinished milk and OJ is poured into this bucket to be disposed of later down the drain.
3. **Recycling Bin:** For diverting recyclable containers from the landfill: milk cartons, juice boxes, soda cans, plastic bottles, etc.
4. **Compost Bin:** Any non-shareable food is put in this bin and taken to an organic waste processing facility where it's converted into compost—to help regenerate the soil in our communities.
5. **Trash Bin:** The small quantity of non-food, non-recyclable items goes to the landfill.
6. **Tray Table:** Food trays and plates that cannot be washed and reused are stacked to maximize capacity for every trash bag.

Over 100 tons of food waste have been diverted from the landfill and over 13 tons of healthy, edible food have been rescued.