

Smart Cafeteria Initiative

Feeding communities, preventing wasted food

Estimates reveal that nearly one in three children in Alameda County is food insecure, meaning they don't know where their next meal will come from. At the same time, over six million pounds of food is wasted in California each year. Like most institutions that serve food, schools inevitably have surplus edible food that often goes to waste unnecessarily.

In 2018, StopWaste partnered with Alameda County school districts and food recovery organizations to pilot a new food donation program through the Smart Cafeteria Initiative. This program, funded in part by a grant from CalRecycle, was designed to help schools reduce waste through prevention, food share, re-serving, and donation to those in need. The project also reduces food packaging and utensils through source reduction and by replacing single-use disposables with reusables.

The Smart Cafeteria Initiative provides technical assistance and equipment necessary for safe handling of food for sharing and donation. This is paired with a curriculum for students that is focused on restoring the importance of food as sustenance and introducing them to the food recovery hierarchy.

The program also aims to help schools meet a new statewide edible food donation mandate included in the SB 1383 legislation, which requires that food generators increase the percentage of edible surplus food that is donated rather than ending up in the landfill.

Moving forward

Despite the challenge of COVID-19, rescuing surplus school food is still vitally important and can continue safely with proper food handling and sanitation procedures. StopWaste is working with the Alameda County Department of Environmental Health and district partners to develop safe donation procedures that prioritize feeding people and preventing waste. We are also exploring opportunities for direct donation to families and recovery partners.



During this pilot program,
90,000 meals worth of food

were rescued and donated to our community instead of going to landfill.

On average, schools showed a

60% reduction

in the amount of food sent to the landfill during their two-week kick-off challenge.



Students learn about the food recovery hierarchy, a guide that prioritizes actions organizations can take to feed people and help prevent edible surplus food from ending up in the landfill.