



# Food Waste In Maine Schools

Maine's 620 public schools, educating 183,000 children, may be wasting more than seven million pounds of food every year! Reducing food waste in schools has immense benefits for students, taxpayers, and the environment.

## The Problems:

**Costs** Wasting food is very expensive. Purchasing and preparing food for school dining services costs a lot. When that food is thrown away, there are additional costs to dispose of the waste, calculated by weight. Food is mostly water, making it one of the heaviest things in the truck. If a school needs to find some extra money in the budget, a good place to start is by reducing waste.

**Food Insecurity** Maine is the most food-insecure state in New England and ninth in the nation. One in four Maine children is food insecure, meaning they do not have regular access to enough nutritious, affordable food. Many children receive the majority of their caloric and nutritional content from school and, for some children, that's the only place they can get food. Yet millions of pounds of food are going to waste. Maine can do better.

**Environmental Sustainability** The U.S. wastes an astounding 40% of the food it produces. The agriculture industry accounts for about 10% of our total energy used, 80% of our freshwater consumption, and 50% of our land. Yet almost all uneaten food ends up in landfills where it decomposes and releases methane gas—which has 25% more heat-trapping capability than carbon dioxide. When we waste food, we waste all of the resources used to make that food, and we contribute harmful greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere.

## Solutions!

The Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) is committed to helping Maine schools waste less food. We can help interested parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and students create food waste reduction plans and programs right in their schools, saving money, getting students outside, and getting more healthy food into the bellies that need it most.

NRCM can help you create sustainable change in your school. We will help you set up a steering committee of interested people and move up the food recovery hierarchy to its highest use. Specific actions can include:

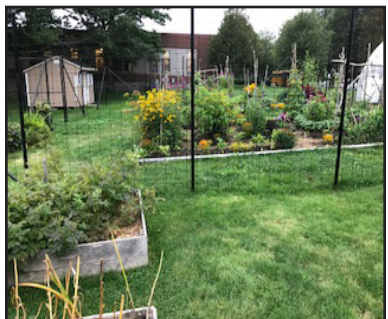
- conducting a food waste audit;
- creating a share table where kids can drop off unwanted food and drink for others;
- partnering with local farmers to feed food scraps to livestock, and
- creating a composting and complementary school garden program.

NRCM staff has the environmental, advocacy, facilitation, agricultural, and community experience that can help you succeed. For more information contact us at (207) 622-3101 or [nrcm@nrcm.org](mailto:nrcm@nrcm.org).

## Food Recovery Projects Throughout Maine



**RSU 19** is a large, geographically dispersed school district in the heart of central Maine comprised of eight schools with nearly 2,000 students from eight rural communities (Corinna, Dixmont, Etna, Hartland, Newport, Palmyra, Plymouth, St. Albans). RSU 19 is working on multiple projects to reduce food waste. NRCM helped form a steering committee of administrators, school board members, teachers, and students with the goal of creating a holistic, district-wide approach to food waste reduction. The first step was to determine exactly how much food was being wasted with a year-long data collection project.



**Mount Desert Elementary** has an incredible school garden program run by Betsy Minott, a professional restaurant chef; Emily Minot who works to change the way students and the community think about school lunch; and Principal Gloria Delsandro, who wants to get students outside making connections. Though the school has tried several times in the past to institute food waste reduction and recycling programs, none has been sustained. NRCM is helping facilitate the school's expansion into the realm of food waste reduction in a way that envelops it into the school's culture. This will help foster the overall strategy of many on MDI who are working to make the island communities more sustainable through initiatives like A Climate to Thrive.



**Massabesic Middle School** science teacher David Pope helped this large southern Maine school establish a composting program that acts as a model for other schools. The program, now in its sixth year, is completely student run. Students make sure lunch waste is sorted and processed, and take all measurements and recordings of important data like compost temperature and pH, which helps them to work with custodial staff to know when to turn their large piles. NRCM is working to help Massabesic move food up the recovery hierarchy by looking at ideas like food waste audits to help reduce the amount of waste produced in the first place.



**Sebago Elementary School** science teacher Tim Bridge-Koenigsberg and Principal Kirsten Goff are working to change the food culture for their young students on the shores of Sebago Lake. NRCM is helping them begin a program of food waste reduction, starting with new separation, data collection, composting, and share table efforts. At the same time, students will be learning to separate recyclables from other waste. Tim is working with a local farmer to redirect some of the school's food waste to local livestock, moving Sebago Elementary food up the recovery hierarchy.



**Nokomis Alternative Education** is creating diverse curriculum opportunities for students who need a different approach than the traditional educational model. Teacher Jeff Giallombardo has created an incredible array of ways for his students to connect hands-on learning experiences with curricula from biology to chemistry, math to business skills. NAE maintains an aquaponics research lab constructed and run by the students, who grow produce and sell it to local stores. Jeff and his students also have expanded their agricultural endeavors to include a hoop house (which NRCM staff helped students build), raised beds, and food waste reduction efforts, including outdoor compost bins and an indoor vermi-composting system.



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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