



Bulk Food Purchasing vs. Prepackaged Servings

Purchasing in bulk is often more economical as well as an effective way to reduce the packaging waste.



What advantages are there in purchasing items in bulk rather than packaged?

Purchasing practices by both Food Service and Building and Grounds can reduce cost, promote environmental waste reduction and conservation, while providing healthy and attractive options for students and staff.

Suggestions could include the following:

- Use permanent washable silverware, plates, kitchen towels, aprons and hair restraints.
- Purchase biodegradable products or products made from recycled material when disposable items are needed.
- Order bulk food from local farmers and vendors.
- Use seasonal foods to maximize freshness and provide food variety.
- Collaborate with other schools whenever purchasing low usage items; reduces excessive packaging and costs.
- Use furniture including table and chairs for cafeteria that can be purchased with minimal packaging.
- Use cleaning products that can be purchased in concentrated form to limit packaging.

Note: The latest EPA waste characterization study indicates containers and packaging accounts for 29.5% of the waste stream, the largest category they track by product type.

Bulk Food Purchasing versus Prepackaged

Warehouse stores offer many foods in bulk. Even grocery and health food stores offer larger packages or bulk bins of dry food for purchase. Choosing between bulk food and individual

serving packages involves several factors to determine which option is most cost-effective. Take the time to figure what works.

Cost

Deciding between bulk and individual packaging often requires a little math to determine the best deal. Bulk packaging is sometimes thought to be cheaper than smaller packages, but in some cases, it actually costs more. Take the time to do the math and save.

Stockpiling

Bulk foods allow schools to stockpile the items students eat most often. When bulk-foods go on sale, schools are able to fill their pantries at the lowest price to save money. The stockpile offers quick cooking options. Schools will also have an emergency food source in case of bad weather or illness.

Packaging

Bulk food requires less packaging than individual serving packaged food items. This results in less waste. In addition, the supplier doesn't have to use as much packaging since it is putting larger quantities into fewer packages. In the case of bulk bins in a grocery store, the manufacturer can deliver a large quantity of the food at once. Also, individual containers of food take up more space, requiring more storage space and more deliveries to the store.

Storage

When buying in bulk, schools must consider the storage implications two of which are storage space and spoilage. Some schools have plenty of space, all must be concerned about spoilage.

Give serious thought to the type of storage containers and space you have available and how long the food items will last in those conditions. Only buy bulk foods that you are able to store safely and consume before they spoil. (Livestrong.com article of 1/12/2012 by Shelley Frost)

What schools are doing

Stowe Elementary School - Duluth, MN

Stowe Elementary School shows big savings annually by



the elimination of all disposable utensils and dishware. All dishes, silverware and trays are permanent ware and are washed and reused daily. Stowe Elementary School also uses recyclable milk cartons and juice containers. Condiments and produce are bought in bulk and served in melamine dishware to eliminate individual packaging costs. Stowe purchases produce that is grown locally, when available, and in season to cut down on shipping costs. It has also purchased washable cloth napkins for students, eliminating the need to continuously purchase paper napkins.

They have considerably reduced the amount of pre-packaged foods. One example is replacing individual ketchup packets with a large container with a pump. They are buying more bulk food and eliminating the small cups for side items like vegetables and fruits. Now food is placed directly on the trays.

Resources

Milk dispensers in schools

Installing milk dispensers in school cafeterias is one way to reduce waste and cut garbage and recycling costs. This video explores the success of milk dispensers in the Olympia, Washington School District.



Just a Cup - Milk dispensers prevent waste in schools

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7VZWDQcYGw&feature=plcp>

2012 Bulk Food Study

<http://www.bulkisgreen.org/docs/2012-psu-bigstudy.pdf>

Buying Bulk Food versus Single Food

<http://www.livestrong.com/article/553466-buying-bulk-vs-single-food/>