

Questions to Ask for Green School Purchasing for Lunchroom/Cafeteria Products in Florida

1. Determine where waste from the school goes
 - Landfill
 - Bioreactor
 - Waste-to-Energy Plant
2. Determine recycling availability in the county/for the school.
What can be recycled? _____
Is there pickup of recyclables or will the items need to be dropped off somewhere? _____
3. Determine composting availability in the county/for the school.
Is there a commercial or industrial composter nearby that will accept items from the school? _____
Will those items be picked up or will they need to be dropped off? _____

Option 1: Composting available at a commercial/industrial composter

If composting is available focus purchasing on items that will easily degrade in the composter: Paper and bioplastics that are compostable. Bioplastic items that are compostable should meet ASTM International standards either ASTM D6400 or D6868. Also check with the facility that will be accepting the compostable items for further specifications/standards.

Paper products should have post-consumer recycled content in as high a percentage as available.

Option 2: Composting available at small scale composter (not commercial/industrial composter)

If composting is available on a smaller scale then bioplastics should be avoided because they are made to degrade only under the specifications of a commercial/industrial composter. Small scale composting will find that most bioplastics do not degrade readily. Focus on purchasing paper items with a high percentage of post-consumer recycled content.

Option 3: Composting not available, recycling of plastics and paper is available.

Check with your recycling facility about how much food waste/contamination they are willing to accept at their facility. Determine if there are methods to reduce contamination (scraping off trays and plates, dumping food separately from plastic items). Once methods are in place to reduce contamination to an acceptable level, look to purchase plastic items with a high percentage of post-consumer recycled

content. For paper items determine if the recycling facility can accept wet/contaminated paper items. If paper items with some food contamination are acceptable purchase paper items with a high percentage of post-consumer recycled content.

Option 4: Composting not available, recycling not available, waste goes to a landfill.

Landfills are highly engineered structures that are designed to bury waste, not to break it down. Therefore focus on purchasing items that are not meant to break down: plastics. Do not purchase bioplastics instead focus on purchasing plastic items with a high percentage of post consumer recycled content. Focus on reducing waste and packaging in order to go as green as possible.

Option 5: Composting not available, recycling not available, waste goes to a bioreactor.

Bioreactors are like landfills but are designed to have carefully controlled amounts of oxygen and moisture in order to speed up the process of breakdown. Bioreactors produce landfill gas which can be used to create energy. Focus on purchasing items that will breakdown readily in a bioreactor: paper. Most bioplastics are not meant to breakdown in bioreactor but rather are designed to breakdown in a high heat commercial or industrial composter. The breakdown process is not the same. Purchase paper items with a high percentage of post consumer recycled content and focus on reducing waste and packaging in order to go as green as possible.

Option 6: Composting not available, recycling not available, waste goes to a waste-to-energy facility.

Waste-to-energy facilities burn waste in order to create heat which is turned into energy. High value items for a waste-to-energy facility are items that readily burn such as paper and plastic. Focus on buying items that have a high percentage of post-consumer recycled content and on reducing waste and packaging in order to go as green as possible.