



INFORMATION UPDATE

Drafter: Jane Evans
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Rationale for Providing Information to Minister's Office

This update provides information on surplus lunches from the Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme.

Information

Context

In recent weeks there has been increased interest in the volume and management of surplus lunches generated as part of the programme, and a view that it is 'wasteful' in the short-term. The Minister and Ministry have received multiple WPQs, OIA requests and media enquiries about this.

The programme defines 'waste' as partially eaten food. If a lunch is untouched, then it is considered 'surplus'. The Ministry is aware of the interest regarding surplus lunches, and we are actively working with schools and suppliers to reduce surplus.

Varying orders to manage surplus lunches

Surplus lunches are generally a result of over-ordering. Schools order lunches based on their school roll and it is their responsibility to keep their supplier informed with the most up to date student numbers and information on any medical or religious dietary requirements. Over time, as consumption data becomes more reliable, we expect schools and suppliers will be able to better predict demand for lunches on a daily basis and vary their orders to further reduce surplus lunches. We are aware there is no way to completely prevent surplus lunches as there will always be unexpected absences in schools.

Where there is surplus food, schools and kura are redistributing to those in need

We encourage schools to redistribute lunches and have heard of a range of ways schools are passing on surplus lunches in ways that benefit the community and continue to improve food security. Examples of schools redistributing surplus lunches include:

- Sending them home with students
- Giving them to whānau who need support
- Using them for morning and afternoon tea and after school snacks
- Sharing with kōhanga reo

- Using local food redistribution organisations and churches who send lunches to food banks, shelters and other community groups

Food safety is a key factor for schools deciding what to do with surplus lunches. If schools choose to redistribute any surplus lunches, guidance developed in collaboration with the Ministry for Primary Industries is provided on how to manage this safely.

Where there are partially eaten lunches, schools and supplier make arrangements to manage the waste

Suppliers are all responsible for managing any food waste that arises from partially eaten lunches. Suppliers work with schools and kura to put solutions in place. These include:

- Composting
- Redistributing to pig farms
- Using for worm farms at schools

Similar challenges of managing food waste exist regardless of whether the student brings their lunch or not. This is why a number of schools already had these arrangements in place. There is also anecdotal feedback that there is much less packaging rubbish in schools now they receive lunches.

We know from experience that surplus lunches decline over time

As many whānau will know, children's tastes vary and it can be challenging to provide healthy food they will eat. Untried lunches in the first term of implementation are a normal part of this transition, as students get used to the food and suppliers learn more about students' tastes. The Ministry provides support to schools and suppliers to manage this transition, including menu adaptation and practical approaches. More information for schools is available at [Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Programme: resources for participating schools and kura – Education in New Zealand](#)

We continue to monitor and respond as we learn from the implementation process

We continue to ask schools to provide information about how they manage surplus lunches in their end of term reporting. This includes how they vary their orders to minimise surplus lunches and how they redistribute lunches in their community. This is also reported through our monitoring processes. This will help to inform our practice guidance and operational responses in the longer-term.

There is no requirement for schools to count surplus lunches on a daily or weekly basis, due to the administrative burden on schools and our expectation that the number of surplus lunches will diminish the longer schools are administering the programme.