



Every Tray Counts (ETC) is a North Carolina based nonprofit dedicated to creating sustainable lunchrooms in schools across the state.

What does Every Tray Counts do? ETC works with public schools and community members to develop sustainable practices in lunchrooms, including educating students about sustainability, purchasing compostable trays and developing a compostable waste diversion program.

Why focus on polystyrene (Styrofoam™) trays?

- Physical damage to polystyrene trays may increase a student's exposure to styrene from the trays. Students often scrape trays with their utensils to get to all of their food.
- Polystyrene trays are also particularly harmful because styrene and benzene can leach out due to the high temperature as well as the high fat content of food served on the trays.
- Polystyrene trays are not a good candidate for recycling. It is generally not profitable to recycle polystyrene trays from the lunchroom because they are lightweight and contaminated with food debris.
- Polystyrene trays take up a lot of space in landfills and so they decrease the lifespan of the landfill.
- Polystyrene breaks down due to sun exposure (photodegrade) and so is very harmful to our watersheds and to wildlife.

Why aren't schools using dishwashers anymore? Many school buildings lack the plumbing infrastructure and/or budget to accommodate updated requirements. The cost of purchasing, maintaining, and staffing dishwashers are the issues that staff mention when answering this question. However, we do advocate that using reusable trays in each school is evaluated and considered as an option.

Why focus on school lunchroom composting? The average public school student generates about 3 pounds of compostable waste per month in the lunchroom. That equals about 20 thousand tons generated by NC public school students per school year! Together we can divert over 80% of waste generated in NC public schools to a composting facility, give our students an opportunity to learn about issues surrounding waste, and save money for our school districts.

Why can't schools put their lunchroom food waste directly into their garden? Currently a school cannot compost its food waste on site because it contains meat and bones that require a high heat compost system.

Do you support other ideas to eliminate plastics, such as straws, utensils, and take-out containers? We support the elimination of all single-use plastics.

How much food and other compostable waste does each student generate? According to national studies each student generates between 2-4 lbs. of compostable waste per month.

What can I do?

- **Explore** our website: www.everytraycounts.org and learn about sustainability in schools
- **Start** an ETC-group in your area
- **Donate** to Bring Lunchroom Sustainability to all NC Schools
<http://www.everytraycounts.org/help-us-with-our-expenses/>
- **Spread the word!** Follow us on Facebook and Instagram @EveryTrayCounts

