



SECOND HARVEST
of SILICON VALLEY

Addressing College Student Food Insecurity

The Reality of Student Food Insecurity

Despite the broad college student stereotype of carefree learning and independence, college hunger is real and very widespread. Hunger and food insecurity disrupt students' academics and their broader college experience. It is an extra burden to balance and one that underlies much of a person's day—hunger cannot be ignored. Per the Legislative Analyst's Office, 44% of undergraduate students and 26% of graduate students experience food insecurity.¹

Lack of Access to SNAP (CalFresh) for Students

One of the most notable issues underlying prominent levels of food insecurity amongst college students is the inability of college students to receive SNAP (called CalFresh in California) benefits—even if they desperately need food assistance. SNAP is the federally run food assistance program that provides low-income people with an electronic benefits card which provides monthly funds to purchase groceries at most retail stores. While college students can apply for CalFresh, the eligibility requirements in place make it close to impossible to receive aid. The National Center for Biotechnology Information conducted a national survey in which they found only 20% of the food-insecure college students they interviewed received aid through SNAP.² If students could utilize CalFresh, the burden of food insecurity would be eased, and those individuals could focus more attention and energy on academics, developing relationships, and starting their careers.

College Student CalFresh Eligibility Requirements³

Students who are between the ages of 18–49 and enrolled in higher education at least half-time must meet one of the following:

- Working 20 hours or more per week (in addition to full-time college enrollment)
- Have children
- Approved for a TANF-funded Cal Grant A or B
- Enrolled in CalFresh employment and/or training
- Enrolled in a program to increase employability

¹https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4014?utm_source=t.co&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=4014

²Freudenberg N, Goldrick-Rab S, Poppendieck J. College Students and SNAP: The New Face of Food Insecurity in the United States. *Am J Public Health*. 2019 Dec;109(12):1652-1658. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2019.305332. Epub 2019 Oct 17. PMID: 31622149; PMCID: PMC6836795.

³Food Research and Action Center. 2021, April 12. Reducing Food Insecurity Among College Students. Retrieved April 2023 from: <https://frac.org/blog/reducing-food-insecurity-among-college-students>

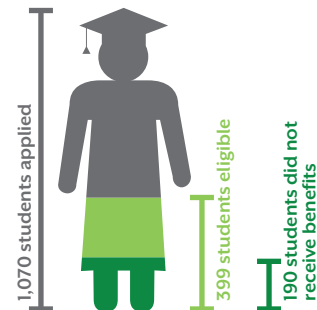


College Hunger within Silicon Valley

Data from Canada College, Skyline College, and College of San Mateo's Student Aid Meals (SAM) program highlights the resource scarcity local colleges face, and the urgency for college students to access federally funded food assistance programs. SAM is a student food assistance support program offered to low-income students attending these colleges.

Around 1,070 students applied to the SAM program in Spring 2023. Of those students, only 399 were eligible for SAM cards. 190 students who were eligible for food assistance did not receive benefits and/or aid due to a lack of program funding. When denied a SAM Card, students shared concerns of the impacts on their academic and social performance:

“ Last semester I had the SAM Card... I wouldn't have to worry about starving but now that I don't, I can't focus in class because I'm not able to eat on campus. I also do sports so now I don't have the energy to go because I'm not able to eat.”



In Santa Clara County, interviews with students using school pantries and college basic need center staff revealed similar responses. Low-income students who do not have a food benefit resource are struggling with their academics and social commitments.

“ Sometimes you have to go hungry, you have to show up hungry. And I think that just makes everything harder.”
—SJSU Student

Solutions—The EATS Act & AB-870

A federally funded and widely available solution is necessary. H.R. 3183, [The Enhanced Access to SNAP Act \(EATS Act\)](#), attempts to tackle the most significant barriers to college CalFresh access. This Act would allow attendance at an institution of higher education to fulfill the work requirement for SNAP/CalFresh.

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In California, AB-780 (Arambula) represents another means of alleviating some of the burden of food insecurity for students. The bill proposes a regular meeting of relevant stakeholders and staff liaisons to discuss problems and recommendations in administering the CalFresh program for students. The bill seeks to increase the enrollment of students in food assistance programs.

The current CalFresh eligibility requirements do not provide students with the food assistance they need and deserve. College is designed to be a time of academic, personal, and social growth. The burden of food insecurity hampers this growth and creates an unequal experience for many. The EATS Act and AB-780 seek to make CalFresh widely available for the students that struggle with food insecurity and would give students an equal opportunity to strive for a happy, healthy, and productive college experience.

