

## Your Question(s):

- What data and resources are available detailing food insecurity on college campuses?
- What has been the state policy and institutional response to curtail this growing concern?

## Our Response:

### Issue Overview

Students navigate a myriad of barriers towards degree completion but one issue that is gaining increased attention is the prevalence of food insecurity across college campuses. The [USDA](#) defined food insecurity as: *the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food and limited or insufficient ability to acquire adequate and safe foods in an acceptable way*. Students across all types of campuses can struggle with varying levels of food insecurity that can have exponential negative effects on their academic success, housing stability, and employment status. [A 2016 survey](#) of 33,000 students at 70 community colleges found that two in three community college students are food insecure. [Another study](#) found that of nearly 4,000 students from 12 community colleges and 26 four-year institutions, 48% of respondents reported some level of food insecurity and 22% were highly food insecure. These impacts are particularly hard felt for [low-income students](#) or individuals coming from historically marginalized groups such as students of color, [homeless students](#), [foster youth](#), and first-generation college students.

With the growing spotlight on food insecurity across the nation, state policy makers and institutional leaders alike have responded to address these needs with a variety of policy and practice efforts.

### State-level Policy Action

Much of the policy development regarding food insecurity has resided within social policy contexts resulting in college students able find some supplemental resources within their broader communities outside of campus. In 2017, for example in **South Carolina** ([S 636](#)) and **New Jersey** ([AJR 51](#)) enacted legislation specifically calling attention to hunger in their state and designating one month per year as food donation or hunger action month respectively. Thus, those states have seen an increased use of social supports and participation in providing healthy and accessible food to those in need, likely including college students. Similarly, some states such as **Maine**, **Washington** and **New Mexico** have continued to demonstrate policy support for food insecurity by (1) reauthorizing state funding allocation for program development, (2) redesigning agriculture regulations and (3) data collection on the food security needs in

### Additional Resources

[Food Insecurity in the United States: How Do States Compare](#)  
(an interactive visual)

[Hunger on Campus: The challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students](#)

[Food Insecurity: Lawmakers Hear About Impact of Food Insecurity on College Campuses](#)

their state. These initiatives, although not specifically targeting food insecurity among college students, can have an indirect impact for by creating additional supports that student can benefit from.

**California** is one example of a state that has enacted legislation with direct intent to reduce the incidence of hunger and homelessness among college students. State data shows that one in five California State University students experiences chronic hunger and one in 10 University of California students do not have access to adequate food or nutrition. Students and community college are more likely to experience food insecurity. [AB 214](#) now requires all postsecondary institutions to collaborate with the [Restaurant Meals Program](#) in their county to have food vendors and eating facilities on campus and inform students of the range of support available. This bill would also express legislative intent to clarify educational policies and federal eligibility requirements for purposes of improving access for low-income students to the CalFresh program. CA AB 214 widens the scope of programs defined as increasing the student's employability, therefore making more students eligible to take advantage of CalFresh benefits, thus reducing likelihood of food insecurity.

### **Institutional Action**

There has also been discussion and action regarding food insecurity at the institutional level. The [College and University Food Bank Alliance](#) (CUFBA) has been a leading partner in alleviating food insecurity, hunger, and poverty among college students. With their support, and the intentional action of students, faculty, and administrations, many campuses have begun to establish food pantries and nutrition programs that assist students in finding adequate and healthy food. Additionally, their website includes a list of member campuses also committed to addressing food insecurity.

At the University of Northern **Colorado**, the pantry was opened a few years ago. Students attending the university are welcome to visit the food pantry up to twice a week, gathering five to 10 items for free throughout the week. The pantry offers food as well as hygiene products, soap and other household necessities. Students at the **Arizona** State University campuses, with the help of faculty and the ASU sustainability grant, established the [Pitchfork Pantry](#) located at both the Tempe and Downtown Phoenix campuses. The sites work hand in hand with the ASU Student Anti-Hunger Coalition and local-area food providers to eliminate food insecurity on campus.

Historically there has been more policy support and regulation of food insecurity at the K12 level, but there is increasing need for policymakers to consider their role in mitigating food insecurity in postsecondary education. As colleges costs continue to rise and campuses aim to support students with a variety of needs and backgrounds, the negative impacts of food insecurity is likely to rise without intentional policy and program development.

If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Education Commission of the States.