



## Introduction

Assembly Bill (AB) 85 amended the 2020–21 State Budget Act to include a one-time appropriation of \$650,000 to support the University of California’s campus efforts to increase student applications to the CalFresh program. This report includes details of how funds were distributed to campuses, how the funds were used, and how many students applied for CalFresh as a result of these actions. Appendix A includes the full State Budget Act language to which this report responds.

## Background

CalFresh, also known at the federal level as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is a highly effective program that provides individuals with monthly food benefits. It is known as the largest food benefit program in California. SNAP provides an essential hunger safety net. CalFresh enrollment for college students has become a critical component of meeting their basic needs. The University of California has made concerted efforts to increase CalFresh outreach, education, and enrollment in close collaboration with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), the California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges (CCC).

## Distribution of Funds by Campus

In 2021, the University of California distributed \$650,000 across its ten campuses based on the estimated proportion of food-insecure undergraduate and graduate students on each campus. These estimates were informed by data collected during the 2020 *UC Undergraduate Experience Survey* and the 2016 *UC Graduate Student Wellbeing Survey* (the most recent data available). Figure 1 includes a breakdown of funding by campus.

Campus	Allocation by Campus
Berkeley	\$82,900
Davis	\$89,700
Irvine	\$87,000
Los Angeles	\$74,100
Merced	\$29,900
Riverside	\$73,600
San Diego	\$90,800
San Francisco	\$5,600
Santa Barbara	\$64,800
Santa Cruz	\$51,600
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$650,000</b>

## University Efforts

### *Partnership with Financial Aid*

CalFresh outreach efforts rely on critical partnerships between UC basic needs centers and financial aid offices and CDSS offices to ensure that requirements for student eligibility are met. As a result of the pandemic, CalFresh eligibility was temporarily extended to include all students with \$0 expected family contribution (EFC), as well as those eligible for Federal Work Study. In spring 2021, UC financial aid offices notified over 95,000 students about their CalFresh eligibility via email. These notifications included instructions on how to use the verification letters in their applications. Additionally, several campuses incorporated these letters directly into student portals for easy access, allowing eligible students to view and print their verification letter at their convenience. Appendix B includes a sample verification letter.

### *Partnership with California Policy Lab*

In 2020, the California Policy Lab (CPL), a non-partisan research institute based at the University of California, partnered with the UC Office of the President (UCOP) to examine UC students' use of CalFresh food benefits by linking de-identified individual-level administrative data from UCOP, CDSS, and CSAC. As a result of this partnership, CPL created the first-ever linked database of student-level records from each agency, containing information on college enrollment, financial aid, and participation in public safety net programs in California.

CPL constructed reliable estimates of the number of UC students who received and participated in the CalFresh program from 2010 to 2020. Preliminary results from CPL found that 12 percent of undergraduate students and 4.2 percent of graduate students were enrolled in CalFresh in academic year 2019–20. CPL also found that overall rates of UC student enrollment in CalFresh increased from 2016 onwards, particularly among undergraduate students at UC Merced and UC Santa Barbara and among graduate students at UC San Francisco, though preliminary data for fall 2020 show declines for undergraduates (9.8 percent) in that term. The increase in enrollment over time may have been driven by food security-related initiatives and additional funding introduced around this time. These preliminary results on CalFresh participation do not yet take into account students' eligibility for the program. CPL will continue to refine these participation estimates and is also working on estimating CalFresh eligibility among UC students.

### *Partnership with the Center for Healthy Communities*

The Center for Healthy Communities (CHC) based at California State University Chico supports the three California higher education systems in their statewide CalFresh outreach efforts. The Center also received AB 85 funding to support CalFresh outreach and application assistance efforts to increase the number of students applying for CalFresh. In June 2021, the three public higher education segments convened to develop shared objectives and identify best practices for coordinating CalFresh outreach efforts across the state. In addition, CHC holds the USDA contract for CalFresh outreach efforts in which eight UC campuses participate. As a result of these collaborative efforts, CHC will host quarterly meetings to offer technical assistance and training and to develop suggested activities for best practices for CCC, CSU, UC, CDSS, and California higher education CalFresh outreach contract schools. The goal of all these efforts: to continue increasing CalFresh enrollments.

### Campus Efforts

All UC campuses have employed a wide range of activities to increase CalFresh enrollment. These efforts include a wide range of services such as application assistance, outreach efforts, and education. Application assistance continues to be a key strategy in supporting student enrollment efforts and is a strategy used by all ten campuses within the system. In addition, outreach and education are key to raising awareness about these public benefits. All campuses partner closely with financial aid offices, community-based organizations, and county offices to ensure targeted messaging to all students. This messaging is intended to reduce stigma and normalize the use of CalFresh benefits among students. Many campuses have used peer educators and ambassador programs to support these efforts. A summary of systemwide efforts can be found in Figure 2, and the number of students served is defined in this report as:

1. *Students uniquely served* refers to unduplicated students affected by direct services, e.g., a student who has received application assistance.
2. *Students directly served* refers to all services that directly affect the student and may result in duplicate contacts made, e.g., multiple application assistance sessions.
3. *Students indirectly served* refers to all services that passively affect the student and may result in duplicate contacts made, e.g., outreach efforts, such as mailings, emails, and social media campaigns.

<b>Figure 2: Total systemwide efforts reported from January 1, 2021 to September 30, 2021.</b>			
<b>Systemwide Efforts</b>	<b>Students Uniquely Served</b>	<b>Students Directly Served</b>	<b>Students Indirectly Served</b>
Application Assistance	9,668	11,289	11,850
Outreach	44,889	58,635	214,256
Education	3,631	5,729	57,592
<b>Total</b>	<b>58,188</b>	<b>75,653</b>	<b>283,698</b>

### Conclusion

As a result of the one-time funding from California’s Budget Act of 2020 (AB 85), students received very substantial support from campuses during a critical time of need. These funds supported 58,188 unique students across the University from January 1, 2021 to September 30, 2021. In addition, the University has made tremendous efforts to partner closely with the Center for Healthy Communities and the other higher education segments to ensure that effective best-practice strategies are implemented.

While the one-time funding aided in expanding CalFresh outreach efforts, further support is needed to reach the estimated 416,000 and 689,000 students across the state of California who likely meet the eligibility

criteria, as reported by the CDSS. Campuses reported challenges with the complexity of student eligibility rules and exemptions which are barriers to the uptake of student enrollment, causing students to be unnecessarily disqualified from CalFresh benefits. These challenges are also impacted by data limitations between counties and campuses, making it difficult to arrive at an accurate estimate of student eligibility.

**Appendix A**  
**Text from the Budget Act of 2020 (Assembly Bill 85)**

With regard to \$650,000 for campus efforts to increase student applications to the CalFresh program:

Of the funds appropriated in this item, \$650,000 is provided to support University of California campus efforts to increase student applications to the CalFresh program. Funds may be used to create outreach materials, host events, support equipment needs, and support application assistance, including hiring staff and student workers to assist students with their applications to CalFresh and with understanding about how to use their CalFresh benefits. The University shall report back to the Department of Finance and relevant committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2021 as to how funds were distributed to campuses, how funds were used, and how many students applied for CalFresh as a result of these activities.

Appendix B  
Sample CalFresh Letter

Student Name:

Student ID:

Date:

SUBJECT: VERIFICATION OF WORK STUDY APPROVAL FOR CALFRESH

The University of California, Santa Cruz, Office of Financial Aid, has confirmed that you are approved for work study during the Spring 2021 term.

Based on your work study approval, you may be eligible for CalFresh benefits.

CalFresh is money for food that comes on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, which works like a debit card. It can help you pay for groceries while you are in college. We encourage you to apply for CalFresh to make your college expenses more affordable.

Step 1: Apply for CalFresh at [www.getcalfresh.org/students](http://www.getcalfresh.org/students) or call 1-877-847-3663.

Step 2: Upload a copy of this letter with your application or give a copy to your worker.

Sincerely,

Financial Aid and Scholarship Office  
UC Santa Cruz (831) 893-2963

**Attention County Social Services Partners:** This letter serves as acceptable verification that the student listed above has been approved for work study and may be exempt from the CalFresh student eligibility rule. Students who are approved for work study and anticipate working during the term, are exempt from the student eligibility rule per 7 CFR 273.5. This applies to all approved work study positions whether on campus, remote, or off campus. Please refer to the CalFresh Student Eligibility Handbook for more information (released in All County Letter 20-08).

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