

## Students on the Front Lines to improve college food security

Exciting things are happening across California to address hunger on college campuses and students are at the heart of it. We interviewed partners from CSU Chico, and Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo to learn more about the evolution of their food security programs and the important role their students play in advocating for change.

At Chico State there are many programs in place including CalFresh Outreach, [The Hungry Wildcat Food](#) Pantry, an Organic Vegetable Project, a Basic Needs work group and numerous programs to promote healthy eating on a budget. President Gayle Hutchinson is a champion for programs and has been instrumental in changing the culture on campus.



Emily Foxworthy works with Chico State students every day and she shared her perspective on the progress made on campus “It’s been so incredible to watch the CalFresh Outreach program evolve over the past few years. I feel like our campus, specifically our students, have just completely embraced the topic of food insecurity and basic needs. It is now just a part of our campus culture to lift up others that need support. I

see that every single day in the way students help each other in the food pantry, encourage roommates to check out CalFresh and their excitement over fresh fruits and veggies during our Pop Up Pantries. We have made so much progress that now our students are our program’s best advocates, they do all our marketing and messaging for us! The number one way a student comes in for application assistance is through a referral from a friend.”

Cal Poly is a leader with their [Hunger Program](#) which includes an amazing food pantry, the CalFresh Outreach, and an innovative meal voucher program. A community garden and a farmers market on campus are also in the works to open before the next school year. Kelly Condon is a graduate student at Cal Poly and she has worked as the CFO Coordinator for three years. When asked what the most impactful change she has seen, she said “The biggest change I have seen is the



collaboration on our campus.” They have made tremendous strides to change the culture on their campus and create systems to support their students. Kelly explained that, “professors have even added information on their syllabi to encourage students to reach out for food assistance.” Students are seeking opportunities to get involved. They recently had over 80 students apply to work to promote their CalFresh Outreach Program. A huge accomplishment Cal Poly is proud of is their meal voucher system. They created policies that allow students to donate up to 10 of their unused meals to students in need. Their goal is to turn this into a sustainable program in the future.

Both Emily and Kelly were asked where they saw opportunities to improve services. Kelly had this to say, “There are a number of exemptions that students must meet to receive CalFresh. These include federal work study, being enrolled in EOP, receiving Cal Grant A or B, certain dependent criteria, or working an average of 20 hours or more per week. As you can see, there is a large gap between students needing food aid and unfortunately, not meeting any of these requirements.” [Federal Work Study](#) provides part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need, allowing them to earn money to help pay education expenses. The problem is that there are not enough jobs for everyone that is eligible for work study.” There is momentum to change this. In a recent article titled [More Solutions Needed for Campus Hunger](#), it is explained that “college students cannot get SNAP benefits unless they meet certain criteria, such as working at least 20 hours a week and attending school full-time.” The article also suggests that “this rule should perhaps be rethought in light of how [difficult](#) it is to go to school full-time, keep up one’s grades and work more than 20 hours a week.”

Emily shared this about her vision, “while we have made huge progress, we do still have some work to do. The number one thing I hear students say is that they wish they could use their CalFresh EBT card on campus. They wish they could grab a quick snack or lunch between classes with their CalFresh benefits. I would like to see our campus make some legitimate strides towards making this happen for our students. It would benefit them greatly in the classroom, allowing students to stay focused and engaged for learning.”

College students’ efforts have put a face to college hunger through storytelling. In 2017, over 25 students were empowered at ENACT Day to tell their stories and advocate for change at the Capitol. They’re advocacy efforts were a success. That year, the state legislator provided \$2.5 million in one-time funding via Assembly Bill 452 and Senate Bill 85. The funding and legislation helped campuses across California build their food pantries and raise awareness of CalFresh. Students are at the heart of this work and they have been instrumental in changing the policies that support the food security projects we see today. “It is extremely rewarding to see our students become changemakers,” says Emily Foxworthy. “Students will be attending [ENACT Day 2019](#) to continue to advocate for the changes they want to see.