

Food Insecurity Among Students — San Jose / Santa Clara County

Greener Tier • Day 4 • FLOSN Focus (Fresh • Local • Organic • Seasonal • Non-GMO)

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How widespread is it?

Group	Key Data
K–12 (San José Unified School District)	2021 FRPM eligibility \approx 37% (proxy for economic need)
California Universal Meals	Since SY 2022–23, all public K–12 students can receive free breakfast & lunch daily
SJSU (Higher Ed)	\approx 29% of students reported food insecurity (SJSU Cares survey, 2021)

Barriers to Fresh, Healthy Food for Students

- Stigma using free meal programs or pantries; lack of awareness of resources.
- Complicated eligibility for CalFresh; only \sim 1 in 5 eligible college students receive benefits statewide.
- High local cost of living (rent, transport, tuition/fees) squeezes food budgets.
- Time and transportation constraints to get to grocery stores or farmers' markets.
- Cafeteria procurement limits (budget, staffing, supply chain) reduce fresh/local options.

Impacts on Academics, Mental Health, and Well-Being

- Hunger \leftrightarrow difficulty concentrating, lower grades & test performance, higher absenteeism.
- Linked to higher stress, anxiety, and depression among adolescents and college students.
- Irregular meals \rightarrow low energy, poorer diet quality; long-term health risks; less extracurricular participation.

Funding & Access Context

California implemented Universal Meals in SY 2022–23: all public K–12 students can request free breakfast and lunch each school day. We did not find evidence of recent funding cuts at SJUSD that reduced access; however, districts report operational constraints (staffing, supply chain) that can affect menu quality and fresh/local options.

Local Organization Addressing Student Hunger

Spartan Food Pantry (San José State University) — A campus food pantry providing enrolled SJSU students with non-perishables, fresh produce, and refrigerated items. It is open five days a week, reducing stigma by normalizing pantry use as part of student life. The Pantry also assists students with CalFresh applications and has logged tens of thousands of visits since its launch in 2019.

How Our Schools Could Adopt Similar Initiatives

Inspired by the Spartan Food Pantry’s success, schools at K-12 and college levels could introduce similar FLOSN-aligned programs:

- School Gardens — Grow seasonal produce on campus for cafeteria tastings and science classes.
- Farm-to-School — Partner with local farms to source organic, seasonal produce; use California Farm-to-School grants.
- Cafeteria Upgrades — Add salad bars and fruit/vegetable sides featuring local/organic ingredients.
- On-Campus Pantries — Establish small pantries at high schools with refrigeration to offer fresh produce discreetly.
- Nutrition & Cooking Education — Teach seasonal eating, simple recipes, and budgeting for healthy meals.

Why FLOSN Matters (Health • Sustainability • Justice)

- Fresh & Local: Students eat more fruits/vegetables; improved readiness to learn; reduced transport footprint.
- Organic: Limits synthetic pesticides and fertilizers; protects ecosystems and farmworkers.
- Seasonal: Better taste and acceptance; supports local growers during peak harvests.
- Non-GMO: Provides transparency and aligns with family/student preferences.



Student Hunger Crisis

San José / Santa Clara County


By The Numbers

37% SJUSD students get free/reduced meals

29% SJSU students report food insecurity


1 in 5 Eligible college students receive CalFresh

Barriers to Fresh Food


 **Stigma** using programs

 **High cost** of living

 **Complicated** eligibility

 **Time & transport** limits

The Impact

 **Lower grades & test scores**

 **Increased stress & anxiety**

 **Long-term health risks**

This is a Food Justice Issue

Every student, regardless of income, zip code, or background, deserves access to fresh, healthy meals. Food justice means dismantling the systems that create inequality and building a future where nutritious food is a right, not a privilege. When we prioritize FLOS foods in schools, we're investing in equity, sustainability, and the health of our entire community.

The FLOS Solution



Fresh

More nutrients, better learning



Local

Supports farmers, cuts carbon



Organic

No pesticides, healthier soil



Seasonal

Peak flavor & nutrition



Non-GMO

Transparency & choice

Take Action Now

1 Support Student Pantries

Donate to or volunteer at Spartan Food Pantry (SJSU) and advocate for similar programs at local schools.

2 Build School Gardens

Partner with schools to create gardens that grow seasonal produce for cafeterias and classrooms.

3 Advocate for Farm-to-School

Push for local farm partnerships using California Farm-to-School grants to bring FLOS foods to menus.

4 Spread Awareness

Share this info on social media, talk to your school board, and help reduce stigma around food assistance.

@turninggreenorg @environmentalworkinggroup @organiccenter @consciouskitchn | #PGC2025