

Closing the Weekend Hunger Gap: A Backpack Meal Program Proposal for Fresno County's Food-Insecure Students

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Introduction & Background
Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Food insecurity is one of the most pressing public health challenges in Fresno County, where Latino and farmworker families bear a disproportionate share of this burden. 17% Fresno County residents facing food insecurity 1 in 5 Fresno County children facing food insecurity
Contributing Factors
• Structural racism, including occupational segregation of Latino parents into low-wage agricultural work • Food-desert geography: Southwest Fresno has 50,000+ low-income residents with limited grocery access • Chronic underenrollment in CalFresh and WIC due to language barriers and complex applications
Impact on Children's Health
• Short-term: higher rates of hospitalization, anxiety, and school absenteeism • Long-term: impaired cognitive development, iron-deficiency anemia, lower academic achievement, and dental caries • Sustained food insecurity is linked to chronic disease risk, including diabetes and asthma
Community Assets
• The Fresno Food Security Network unites 200+ leaders from 60 organizations around food system change • The Central Valley's agricultural productivity is a substantial, underleveraged local food asset

Recommended Program
• A Power Packs-inspired weekly backpack program, adapted from a model proven in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania • Each pack includes a lb. of protein, fresh produce, milk, shelf-stable staples, and a culturally relevant recipe card • Distributed discreetly each Friday — no separate line, no visible distinction from classmates • Piloted at a single elementary school (FUSD), replacing CCFB's current once-monthly, non-perishable model
Why This Program
• Strong evidence base: communities using this model see fewer children going hungry on weekends • Preserves student dignity • Builds on partners already in place: CCFB supplies food; FUSD provides trusted access to families
Community Partner
This proposal was developed in partnership with the Central California Food Bank (CCFB), the anchor food-security organization for Fresno and four surrounding counties, and Fresno Unified School District (FUSD), which provides a trusted distribution channel within schools. 60M+ Pounds of food CCFB distributes annually 320K People reached by CCFB monthly 260+ Partner agencies across 5 counties CCFB's current backpack program reaches roughly 2,500 students across 12 schools monthly — a small fraction of the 61,850 food-insecure children countywide
Data Use & Dissemination Plan
• Program data governed by a formal data plan ensuring FERPA compliance and IRB oversight • All externally shared findings are de-identified before release • Results disseminated through bilingual family newsletters, policy briefs, conference presentations, and a peer-reviewed manuscript

Evaluation Plan			
• Quasi-experimental design with a matched comparison group: Columbia Elementary (FUSD) vs. Cesar Chavez Elementary (Madera USD) • Primary outcome: household food security status (USDA HFSSM) and reduction in weekend meal skipping • Secondary outcome: Decrease in chronic absenteeism (≥10% of school days missed) • Difference-in-difference analysis compares change over time between groups <i>Evaluation timeline: one academic school year across four phases</i> Pre-Implementation Launch & Baseline Sustained Operations Endline & Reporting			
Budget Snapshot			
\$169,500 <table><tr><td>Food (53%)</td></tr><tr><td>Personnel (45%)</td></tr><tr><td>Transportation & Refrigeration (2%)</td></tr></table> Proposed Year 1 pilot budget (50% enrollment) Funding Strategy • USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grant: up to \$400,000 over 4 years, requiring a 1:1 match • Much of the required match is covered by CCFB in-kind donations — food value, cold storage, and delivery vehicles • Diversification begins in Year 2 through corporate partnerships and individual donor campaigns	Food (53%)	Personnel (45%)	Transportation & Refrigeration (2%)
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Capstone Activities & Skills
• Conducted a literature review to build an evidence-based Analysis Statement • Designed a quasi-experimental, matched-comparison evaluation plan using the USDA Household Food Security Survey Module • Built grant-aligned budget scenarios against USDA Community Food Projects grant parameters • Selected and justified a comparison district based on demographic and programmatic fit • Developed a stakeholder-facing presentation in plain, accessible language • Practiced APA scientific writing and citation-accuracy auditing across multiple deliverables
References
Central California Food Bank. (2024). Unique & innovative programs. https://ccfoodbank.org/home/about-us/programs/ Coughenour, C., et al. (2021). School absenteeism is linked to household food insecurity. <i>Public Health Nutrition</i>, 24(15), 5074–5080. Gundersen, C., & Ziliak, J. P. (2015). Food insecurity and health outcomes. <i>Health Affairs</i>, 34(11), 1830–1839. Ryan, R. M., et al. (2023). The role of public and private food assistance. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i>, 150, 106994. Stahacz, C., et al. (2024). The impact of food aid interventions on food insecurity. <i>Public Health Nutrition</i>, 27(1).
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