

LOCAL NEWS

CalFresh benefits: Second Harvest Food Bank wants to reach community



By [TARA FATEMI WALKER](#) |

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SANTA CRUZ — A single dad with kids, a woman with no kids, a homeless person, a middle-aged person with a job, a senior with no job: all of these people and more may qualify for CalFresh benefits, also known as EBT/SNAP. There are many myths floating around about who is eligible and who is not. With May being CalFresh Awareness Month, this is a perfect time to get the facts straight.

“Some people think you have to have children to qualify for CalFresh benefits, but any individual who meets the eligibility criteria can qualify,” said Gabby Davidson, Second Harvest Food Bank community outreach coordinator.



A CalFresh booth at La Princesa Market Vaccine Clinic. (Contributed)

“I qualified as a household of one in college. CalFresh helped me buy food so I could focus on school, not where my next meal would come from.”

Some mistakenly believe that if recipients have a job, they can't get CalFresh; this is false. Income limits, not employment status, dictate the amount of CalFresh funds a person receives. Also, a person's assets do not affect eligibility.

To find out about qualification, Second Harvest Food Bank can help. In 2021, they helped 1,405 people apply; 82% of these individuals qualified. They offer phone and in-person assistance throughout the year. In May, they do extra outreach including enrollment tables at community events.

“We want as many people to learn about CalFresh as possible,” said Joel Campos, Second Harvest Food Bank community outreach director.

CalFresh is “the first line of defense against hunger,” Campos said. “Because of the pandemic, the government has been giving people more financial assistance than they might normally get.”

Campos and his colleagues enjoy helping people access CalFresh.

“We have opportunities to help people with the most basic necessity, which is food. It’s important for people to have a healthy lifestyle,” Campos said.

Many local community members are seasonal workers with fluctuating income (farm jobs, etc.); in the off-season they struggle.

“When people receive CalFresh benefits, this enables them to purchase food that is culturally appropriate to them, too, and the freedom to prepare their own meals...and also to be conscious of what they’re purchasing,” Campos explained.

For the month of May, Second Harvest Food Bank has co-sponsored a Double Match for the Santa Cruz County farmers markets to encourage buying more fresh produce. Clients can redeem \$10 of their benefits and receive \$20 in matching funds, for a total of \$30 in tokens to use at markets (Westside and Downtown Santa Cruz, Live Oak, Felton, Scotts Valley and Watsonville). The standard, year-round match is to redeem \$10 and receive \$10 in matching funds for a total of \$20.

“During the May Double Match, participation increases dramatically,” said Nicole Zahm, education and events coordinator at Santa Cruz Community Farmers Markets. “In the past we’ve seen it double or even triple at our markets. At the downtown (Santa Cruz) market, participation grew from 30 to 250 individuals in an average week thanks to an ongoing Double Match from the City of Santa Cruz. Many participants say this program helps them align their food buying with their values. Also, for small, diverse farms in our membership this program has been a lifeline, increasing their income substantially. What a powerful program: impacting family and individual health and giving small farms a fighting chance in an industrialized food economy.”

Unfortunately, there is still a stigma associated with those who use CalFresh, formerly known as the Food Stamps Program.

“SHFB brings together local, state and tri-county agencies, community-based organizations, and advocates to share knowledge to help end hunger in their immediate communities. A range of workshops, presentations and key local, state, and national speakers provides tools and insights to end food insecurity,” Campos said.

The Forum includes CalFresh Champion Awards. Presenter Yolanda Henry received the inaugural Champion Award when she worked at La Familia (now Nueva Vista Community Resources).

“I am fortunate I have never had a day where I was hungry. It’s important for those of us who can, to extend a helping hand to those who can’t make ends meet,” Henry said.

Working at La Familia, she was shocked by the number of people who showed up for the weekly distribution of food that came from Second Harvest Food Bank.

“We became partners with (Second Harvest Food Bank) to help people receive CalFresh benefits. One thing we taught people was that it wouldn’t affect immigration status for themselves or their families, which some were afraid of,” Henry said.

Henry is proud of the work that La Familia and Second Harvest Food Bank accomplished together, which included getting some policies changed. For example, felons released from prison—formerly ineligible—can now receive benefits.

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The upcoming forum will both educate and celebrate.

“Anyone interested in helping with increasing advocacy and CalFresh participation is encouraged to attend,” Campos said.

If you go

Register for forum at <https://bit.ly/CalFreshForumZoom>

Interested in CalFresh benefits? Contact 831-662-0991 or foodhotline@thefoodbank.org

SHFB site: thefoodbank.org