

# SoCalFresh

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## SPEAKERS

Kathleen Phan, Keliana Rios, Keisha Kumura

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### **Kathleen Phan** 00:00

Hi everyone. Welcome back to Triton Tools and Tidbits. I'm Kathleen Phan, the AVP of the Office of Food and Housing Resources and today I'm joined by Keisha Kumura and Keliana Rios, some of our CalFresh outreach assistants at UC San Diego. On this episode, we thought we'd start CalFresh Awareness month off right by answering some of the frequently asked questions regarding CalFresh. Now I'm going to turn it over to one of our CalFresh assistants to talk about - what is CalFresh? And how did it come to be?

### **Keliana Rios** 00:27

Thank you for the introduction, Kathleen. Hi, I'm Keliana, and I'm so excited to be here with everyone today. So that's an excellent question. What is CalFresh? And how did it become to be? Well, CalFresh is California Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. It's gonna award students and other individuals who are eligible with monthly grocery benefits based on individual needs to help supplement their food budget and buy food. This could be up to \$234 a month with EBT benefits - it does fluctuate. And it's a great question - how did it come to be - because CalFresh was formerly known as food stamps. But the word food stamps was stigmatized, and we want it to be friendlier, and helpful. And we want people to feel that this is fresh, [these are] nice benefits. So, it actually started in 1980s. They act as a safety net against hunger for Americans with low income. The program expanded due to severe domestic hunger, and food stamps began. So that's how it kind of developed and it started to grow even more. And later, it got renamed to CalFresh. So, I hope that really helps answer that question for you.

### **Kathleen Phan** 01:36

Thank you, Keliana. I'm going to turn it over to Keisha now to explain how CalFresh works.

### **Keisha Kumura** 01:42

Yeah, that's another great question. So, if you apply and you're deemed eligible under certain guidelines, like income, and if you're a student - certain student exemptions that you fulfill - then you will be deemed eligible and you'll be sent your EBT card and PIN in the mail. It kind of acts like a debit card, you just swipe it at grocery stores and other stores that accept CalFresh. You just swipe it, you

put your pin in, and you that's basically it. It works like a debit card, but it's specific to food, and you can only buy food that has a nutrition label on it. So, something like vitamins or alcohol, you can't buy that, but anything like fruit, and vegetables, and meat, and stuff like that, it totally works. And then whenever you swipe it and you get your receipt - you can find your remaining balance for the month on your receipt. But you can also find it on other places like the Fresh EBT app, which I highly recommend because it also gives you coupons and stuff to help you manage your CalFresh EBT budget.

**Kathleen Phan 02:54**

Thank you, Keisha. I'm gonna hand it back to Keliana to explain what the process is for CalFresh, and who should apply for CalFresh?

**Keliana Rios 03:02**

So, this is a great question. I highly suggest everyone applies. We'll talk a little bit about that later. But just talking about eligibility, there are specific student [qualifications] that students usually are defined in. First, there's three [qualifications] that students must follow. They must be between the age of 18 to 49, they must be enrolled at least part-time at UCSD, and they must be physically and mentally able to work. If you follow those three, then there's other eligibilities where you just need one to apply to CalFresh and most likely be approved. Keep in mind, this doesn't mean you'll be approved, there could be other situations. But this will definitely change how your outcome will go. And there's tons of eligibilities. And if you want to check our website CalFresh.ucsd.edu, there's tons of resources. Some examples of those eligibilities - if you receive Cal Grant A or B, if you have federal work study, if you're a student at UCSD, and tons more. I'll pass it over back to Kathleen, so we can talk more about how to apply.

**Kathleen Phan 04:02**

Yeah, so I'm going to just hand it over to our other CalFresh outreach assistant Keisha to talk about what the process is that someone can take to apply for CalFresh.

**Keisha Kumura 04:10**

Yes, so it's basically an online application. And there are a few ways that specifically UCSD students can apply. The first way is to make an appointment with a CalFresh outreach assistant. So basically, you can schedule an appointment with us anytime. And we'll walk you through the entire application process. We also contact the county on your behalf and let you know if you have any missing documents, or if there's any way that we can move your process forward in terms of the status of your case. Another way is to apply independently. That is probably the most common way that students use to apply. Basically, you just fill out the same online application on your own. But we're always free to answer any questions or provide assistance, even if students do choose to apply independently. We can also help with any point in their case status. So, if they haven't applied yet, if they've already applied or if they're receiving benefits, and they need help recertifying their benefits, or something like that. Another third way that I want to plug to students right now is that we have a couple of virtual clinics later in the quarter. Our first one is going to be on May 11, at 1pm. So, it's from 1pm to 3pm, and students can drop in any time. We're there to help them apply for financial aid; we'll also be there to help answer questions about their financial aid letters. And the county will also be there. So, if they need to talk to the county specifically, and they need to know something about their case that we don't know, then they can talk to [the county] directly.

**Keisha Kumura 05:59**

Going more into the application process in general, it's a pretty short application. You're just answering questions about your personal information - so your name, and your social security and stuff. If someone doesn't have a social security, that's an optional thing. So, you don't necessarily need your social security, but it is recommended. The main thing is that you report your income. That's one of the most important things because that helps determine your eligibility for CalFresh, since it is a food assistance program for low-income individuals. The other main thing is the document submission. There are quite a few things that people would need to submit, in terms of documents - mainly a photo ID, so like a driver's license, or a passport or something like that. Another thing that students can use to submit is their UCSD student ID. They take that too. And then just verifying your income. So, if you have a job, you have to submit your pay stubs from the last 30 days. And if you do freelance work, you need to self-verify for that too. And also, your housing information. So, verifying your rental status - if you don't pay any rent, and you're living at home, then you don't need to but you if you're living on campus or renting somewhere, then you need to provide your housing information. And for students, specifically, your financial aid award letter, which Keliana touched on a while ago already, and your student schedule. Those are all very important, and they're needed to deem you eligible for CalFresh. And we can totally help students figure those things out if they have issues finding something or they're being denied because of their document submission. And that's usually because something doesn't include a student's name on it. So, the most important thing for documents is that it has your full name on everything. And another thing that I can talk about a little bit is, if you live in San Diego County, there are a couple additional documents that you need to submit and as CalFresh outreach assistance, and we can definitely help with that. It's also on our website, [CalFresh.ucsd.edu](http://CalFresh.ucsd.edu). And we are super open to helping at whatever part of the application process someone is in.

**Kathleen Phan 08:31**

Thank you, Keisha. My last question I have for you guys is where can students go to learn more about CalFresh?

**Keliana Rios 08:38**

Great question. As we have said a couple of times, our website is [calfresh.ucsd.edu](http://calfresh.ucsd.edu). We highly recommend going there. On the website, we have resources, but we also have a live chat feature and you're able to use that live chat to talk to one of us - a CalFresh outreach assistant, ASAP, or we'll get back to you almost soon. But if you're filling it out and you have a question on the application, you can live chat us real quick and we can help you right there right then. Another thing is our social media. We actually are on the UCSD basic needs social media. We're a community - a family here too, so to say. Definitely check us out on social medias. We post things on the UCSD basic needs on Facebook, and Instagram. Also, if you check our website, we have a newsletter with the basic needs team. And honestly there's tons of resources on there for y'all to check out. Yeah, that's probably the best way to learn more about CalFresh and the UCSD CalFresh.

**Kathleen Phan 09:40**

Seeing as its CalFresh Awareness Month, what has your team put together for CalFresh awareness on campus this year?

**Keisha Kumura 09:47**

Yeah, thanks for asking. We actually have quite a few events throughout the month. As I mentioned a while ago, our first virtual clinic is on May 11. We also have a second virtual clinic on the 20, which is at the same time, 1 to 3pm. And for those virtual clinics, students can stop by at any time between 1 to 3pm and we'll help them out, and just try to figure out what their specific needs are in terms of applying for CalFresh or figuring out their cases. So, it's pretty chill, and it's kind of mimicking our in-person clinics. Hopefully students will get a lot of use out of that. Another thing is that we're having a basics webinar in collaboration with SPACES - that'll be on May 21, at 5pm. It's going to be an hour, and we'll be talking about eligibility basics. So, kind of fleshing out what we talked about here a little more, and being able to answer specific student questions about their eligibility and what that means for them as an applicant for CalFresh.

**Keliana Rios 10:57**

I'll go over the other two events we have, we actually have a collaboration with the Office of Food and Housing. As Kathleen knows - we've been working on that - it's very exciting that we get to do an opportunity drawing during CalFresh Awareness Month. It's going to be with our live chat feature. We want to really encourage students to use that and let them know that we're here. It's going to start next week, actually, and students are going to learn more about it on the AS Office of Food and Housing Instagram, which I'll let you plug Kathleen, because you probably know that better the @. But one other thing we're doing is a collab with the Triton Food Pantry. We love collaborating with our UCSD community, and May 24, for those who didn't have a chance to get the CalFresh swag items - if they go to the pantry, at either location, OMS or the original one, they'll be able to get some CalFresh swag items there with their groceries. The thing about that is last time we did it, the items were gone in two days. So definitely keep a lookout about that and go if you would like to. But we really just want to thank the community for coming out for these events when we have them. Because we really love when the community comes and supports [us]. And we're just so excited to help y'all out in this way. And then take a look out on our social media for the CalFresh swag item. Because they are awesome. They're cool. And we're so excited for y'all to see it. And yeah, that's all that we're doing for CalFresh Awareness Month. But you know, we're still going to do events throughout the summer, and next quarter. But we're just so excited for this month because we want to keep it fresh here. I know that's cheesy, but CalFresh really, we keep it fresh here at UCSD.

**Kathleen Phan 12:28**

Yeah, and I'll just plug the Office of Food and Housing Resources Instagram, and that's going to be @asucsdfoodandhousing. So as Keliana mentioned, we'll be giving away some CalFresh items. And we'll also be giving away a mini-fridge. So, make sure you tune in and use that chat feature so you can get entered into that opportunity drawing. So, another question I have for the CalFresh outreach assistance is, where we can use the EBT card. Is it only for California, since this is a federal program from the state of California? Or are we allowed to use it in other states and regions of the United States?

**Keliana Rios 13:06**

I'll answer that first targeted question. But for the other state things I know Keisha does a lot of work with-out-of-state students and that kind of thing. So, I'll pass it on there. Again, our website - plugging again - we have a map of where your EBT card is accepted. But keep in mind, there are some places

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on campus, just like Rogers, the Village market - some of those places do have EBT-card accessible. And you could definitely, like I said, check out our website. CalFresh also has a website where you can see all the places that EBT are accepted. So, I highly recommend that. And while we're on that discussion of if you have benefits, on our website, we have CalFresh perks and benefits. And there's other things you can get perks from by just having the EBT card. Some examples are - you can get a discount on your gas SDG&E bill up to 30%. Amazon Prime, you can get 50% off. There's something called Market Mash, because we want to make sure you all go at the farmers market, and stay eating fresh. So definitely check that out. Because it's more than just those EBT benefits. There are so many more perks. I'll pass it along to Keisha to talk about the out-of-state questions.

**Keisha Kumura 14:12**

Yeah, I think that's a really great question. But before I go into that, I also want to add that EBT can also be accepted online now. So, if you do take advantage of that Amazon Prime discount, or even if you don't have Amazon Prime, you can shop for groceries on Amazon using your EBT card. So that would be covered - and there's also places [that take EBT online], like certain Vons locations - and ALDI through Instacart, and things like that. So, there are a lot of changes being made to EBT online currently. For the most updated information, I would recommend checking out our website or reaching out to a CalFresh outreach assistant to know exactly where you can use your benefits if you're unsure. And moving on to the out-of-state question - CalFresh is unfortunately only for the state of California, which is why it's called CalFresh. But students can also apply for nutritional assistance in other states, it's just a different type of the food benefits. It's kind of a similar process as applying for CalFresh, it's just for your state. Unfortunately, we can't really help people who are out-of-state in that way, because we don't have the most up-to-date information about what documents they'll need, how we can contact their county worker and things like that. Instead, we would recommend them reaching out to someone who is in their state who can help them better. But if they do reach out to us, then we can still provide them with additional resources that they might be able to use even if they are out-of-state students. Specifically, at UCSD, international students are also considered unsafe students. And unfortunately, international students are not eligible to apply for CalFresh. If they have something like a J-1 or F-1 visa, which is the most common type of visa for international students, however, we can connect them with other resources like grocery gift cards as well. Even undocumented students, we can try to connect them to the Undocumented Student Services Center. So, if you're unsure about whether you're eligible, as Keliana said, I really encourage you to reach out to us, because even if you might not be eligible for CalFresh, we can still help you access resources that you may be eligible for.

**Keliana Rios 16:44**

And then I'm just going to touch up on a few more things. Let's say you do live in California during the school year, but you go back to the state that you perhaps lived, during summer or during a break and you still have your CalFresh benefits. Well, if you're coming back to California later on, it's okay to use your benefits out-of-state for a couple months. The county may check up on you, like "Hey, you move states, you didn't let us know what's happening." Just let them know, "Oh, I'm still gonna be living at the same address or in San Diego. It's just summer." Usually they don't ask too many questions because they understand if you're a student that you'll probably be leaving for a little bit. So, don't worry about that. And for breaks - like winter break or summer break - if you have CalFresh benefits, don't be too concerned about losing them. If you do move addresses or something, please reach out to us or to

CalFresh and update them. They need to know this information just because they need to be up-to-date. But we're more than happy to help y'all understand how to do that, and what steps and protocols to do it. So just keep in mind if you go - because I know a lot of people actually do that UCDC program, right? And most of them go and they have their CalFresh benefits. They're like, "I'm only here for a couple of months. I don't want to lose them." Don't worry, just tell them that you're coming back that you need the benefits for a little bit. Because just because you moved to another state doesn't mean like your financial aid has changed or anything, or financial aid. So definitely a resource y'all can look into on that. Just wanted to clarify those things.

**Keisha Kumura 18:11**

Yeah. And that actually reminded me of something else that I would like to clarify. So CalFresh is for the entire state of California. But there's a slightly different application process for each county. And I would like to make this clear, because if you use your CalFresh benefits in a different county, because you're traveling or something like that, that's totally fine. You don't have to inform your county worker at all about that. But if you move counties - so your address changes to a different county - then your benefits will have to be transferred, or they'll be cancelled.

**Kathleen Phan 18:52**

Oh, thank you, Keisha and Keliana. I did have another question. I was just wondering if you guys could clarify for the Triton listeners, whether you have to be an undergraduate, or graduate students, or if both could apply for this opportunity?

**Keliana Rios 19:09**

Thank you, Kathleen. I really appreciate you bringing that up for us - what type of student you are. Excellent question. Undergraduate students are eligible, graduate students are eligible, extension students are eligible to apply. You know, everyone's welcome to apply, it's just the eligibilities that really change. And as for eligibilities, I do want to touch in on graduate students, because it's not as common, or perhaps they have different needs. Well, we understand that and we've done some outreaching and if you're part of the School of Medicine, Skaggs School of Pharmacy, and/or chemistry and biochemistry doctoral programs, that can be used in exemption to be eligible for CalFresh. So, what that means is, let's say you're part of the School of Medicine. If you have your letter that you're into the program and it has your name on it - as we said, make sure all your documents have your name, very important - if you have your name on your acceptance letter to the program, you can use that as a document on your CalFresh application to seem as eligible. So, you apply, and you upload that, they see you're part of the School of Medicine, they see that you have your other things, your students schedule your housing information, and then you can be approved right there, because you're part of that program. If you have questions about that, please reach out. We really want to be helping our graduate students towards other temporary eligibilities that are happening right now that have been helping graduate students. And keep in mind, this isn't just graduate students' temporary eligibility - it also applies to undergrads and others - is having an EFC. So, expected family contribution of \$0, which you would find on your financial aid letter - or you can find that on your FAFSA's, I believe, but that one's a bit harder - and then being eligible for work study. So those two are temporary, which means as soon as the pandemic is officially over -the government saying it's done - those will go away. But we have a feeling that that won't be for a very long time. So, we really wanted to help students become more eligible. So definitely look into that about eligibility.

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**Kathleen Phan 21:18**

Yeah, thank you. I have another question. I was just wondering if Keisha could touch on whether financial aid affects the benefits you can receive from CalFresh?

**Keisha Kumura 21:26**

Financial aid is used to determine your eligibility. So as Keliana talked a little about your work study or your Cal Grant, and a lot of other financial aid related exemptions can fulfill a student exemption, so that students are likely eligible for CalFresh. However, that the amount that you receive doesn't actually affect how much you get that's not included in calculating your income or anything like that. So, it's only used to determine your eligibility, but it doesn't actually affect the amount of benefits you'll end up receiving.

**Kathleen Phan 22:07**

Thank you, Keisha. And now I'm going to ask Keliana another question - can you just discuss how long it would take for a student to know if they got CalFresh, and how long the application process typically takes?

**Keliana Rios 22:19**

Great question. I'm really glad you asked that. So usually, if you're filling out the application, it could take up to 30 minutes. The longest I've ever taken is an hour, when I'm working with the student. Usually, if you're working on applying with one of us at the CalFresh outreach assistance, we take maybe 15-30 minutes, because we want to make sure you're getting all those documents in, you're filling out those questions. When students do it by themselves, they also say it's around the same time. So definitely keep around an hour set aside to do that. Also, a little hint if you want to make the application process a bit faster - have all your documents ready. If you have all those documents ready the whole process will feel like different energy, you know - because you definitely need those documents to answer some questions, and then upload them later. But don't worry if you don't have your documents ready, or you don't know what they are. Because if you're applying with us, we'll help you find that. And you're always welcome to outreach and ask: what are these documents? Okay, so after you fill out the application, it really depends. You can hear back by as fast as three days, and then sometimes it will take a month. It really varies. I would say after two or three weeks, if you're getting concerned or you haven't heard anything, we can help you at CalFresh. Just look up our website, and look at our system form, and say "I haven't heard back, I'm concerned." We can tell you the steps we need to complete to reach out to our county worker - keep in mind this is mainly for San Diego, if you're in a different county, it becomes a bit confusing. But we're always welcome to help. We'll get on the phone call with you if you're in Chico County, for example, and then we'll wait with you. We want to help you with CalFresh. But after you get the email, or perhaps they tell you you're approved, it usually takes two to three weeks before you get your EBT card. They're gonna send you two different envelopes, one is going to have your EBT card, and one is going to have your PIN. Make sure you get both of those documents because you can't use one without the other. Once you receive both those documents, that means you're set, you were approved, you have your EBT card, and you're ready to use it. So yeah, thanks for asking that question. Again, it's a great one.

**Kathleen Phan 24:25**

Yeah, so I have one last question. And I'm gonna just turn it over to Keisha since Keliana just answered. I was just wondering how often you'd have to apply for this program, or how long these benefits last?

**Keisha Kumura 24:37**

You technically only need to apply once, and then you re-certify every six months. Basically, you're just reporting any changes in your income and other things they're asking you in order to determine if your benefits should change, or whether the county will continue them or not. You can have [the benefits] as long as you're deemed eligible under the county guidelines. In general, it usually depends specifically on your income and whether you still fulfill an eligibility exemption if you're a student or something like that. But for most individuals, it mostly has to do with their income. Since CalFresh is for low income individuals, if you pass a certain income threshold, then you will be deemed no longer eligible, and your benefits will be cancelled. That's mostly it. I'd say there are other factors that play into it, but it's mainly your net income. And you can technically keep it as long as you need it.

**Kathleen Phan 25:50**

Thank you for tuning into Triton Tools and Tidbits. I'd just like to open the floor for any closing remarks from Keliana and Keisha. And thank you all for coming out and speaking about CalFresh Awareness month once again.

**Keisha Kumura 26:03**

Thank you for having us on. We had a really great time. And I think - I hope, at least - that students will find this helpful. And in case they need any more information, I'd just like to -again - plug our website [CalFresh.ucsd.edu](http://CalFresh.ucsd.edu), because you'll also be able to find our contact information there and a lot of really useful, fleshed-out information that will probably answer almost any eligibility question you have. For specific assistance, you can definitely reach out to us through the contact information we have.

**Keliana Rios 26:39**

Yeah, and I just want to say my closing remarks, and thank you so much for having us. We'd love outreaching, and we love helping students. Please use our live chat live chat feature, come to our walk-ins, fill out our assistant form, do one-on-one... I personally enjoy so much being with y'all and helping the community. So, thank you again for having us on here and being able to share CalFresh knowledge.

**Kathleen Phan 27:04**

Yeah, thank you for coming out and speaking. And just as we end this off, I just want to plug the website real quick. It's [calfresh.ucsd.edu](http://calfresh.ucsd.edu) and just stay tuned for the upcoming events and the opportunity drawings we have this month. Thank you.