

Carls feed Carls:
Fighting summer food insecurity at Carleton

IFSA
Office of the Chaplain
Division of Inclusion, Equity, and Community
2025 Summer Food Insecurity Programming Assessment
October 2025

Abstract

Food insecurity is an issue across the U.S., and does not simply disappear upon the crossing of the college threshold. Carleton students have reported food insecurity that increases in severity and scope during Carleton's summer break period. This past summer, a variety of measures were enacted to combat the various factors that lead to food insecurity in the student body. These measures included Community Meals, a Grab&Go Food Source, Fresh Vending machines, cooking kits, and cooking demonstrations. We use data from the 2025 Food Insecurity Summer Survey (FISS25), usage data recorded throughout the summer, and qualitative feedback from students to assess the efficacy of summer programming. More than three-quarters of respondents reported experiencing some level of food insecurity while on campus this summer. Through statistical and thematic analysis, we find that the programs, especially Community Meals, alleviated certain aspects of food insecurity on campus. Based on the survey results and comments we offer recommendations for next steps to build upon this work.

Introduction

This report is intended to offer a comprehensive overview of the food insecurity programs provided to student workers and summer residents at Carleton during the summer of 2025. Food is an essential part of all of our lives. Being food secure means consistently having access to enough food to live a healthy, active life.¹ People experiencing food insecurity report lower energy, worse health, and more frequent symptoms of depression.² Previous surveys revealed food insecurity to be present in Carleton's student body, and that it became more acute over summer breaks. During the academic year, a 2024 National Collegiate Health Assessment (NCHA) survey of Carleton students found that, of the 425 respondents, 23% scored low on food security. Over the 2024 summer break, 320 students stayed at Carleton.³ Nearly a quarter (75) of those students filled out CSA's survey on food insecurity, and of which 31, or 41.3%, reported being food insecure. Our 2025 summer survey saw an increase in reported food insecurity with 79% of the 64 eligible respondents scoring low on food security, with nuances that are explored later in this report.

Traditionally, Carleton has not provided programs to alleviate summer food insecurity. This changed during the summer of 2025. After collaborative efforts from InterFaith Social Action (IFSA), the Office of the Chaplain, the Carleton Student Association (CSA), a coalition of faculty and staff, the Dean of Students' Office (DOSO), and the Office of the President, \$40,000 of CSA's budget surplus⁴ was allocated to provide support for students facing food insecurity while staying at Carleton over the summer. \$27,000 of that was allocated to the Office of the Chaplain to run Community Meals and a Grab&Go Food Source, of which only \$5,500 was used. The rest of the funding went to DOSO, who oversaw Fresh Vending machines, the distribution of cooking kits, and two cooking demonstrations held by Bon Appetit.

Community Meals were held on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings in the Multicultural Center. Meals varied greatly in cuisine, often inspired by requests from students for dishes of different cultures. Many staff and faculty supported this program by assisting with transportation to get affordable groceries (from Costco or Aldi) and cooking meals. Community meals provided fresh, nutritious food for students, with a focus on including vegetables and protein, and meeting people's dietary needs. The Grab&Go Food Source consisted of three cabinets filled with single serving non-perishable food items, open to students on Tuesdays from 5:30-8:30pm and Saturdays from 1:00-4:00pm. Options were limited as the Grab n Go was expected to be supplementary and not the primary food source for students. Food items included apple sauce, ramen, energy bars, trail mix, and canned tuna. Fresh Vending machines repurposed unpurchased

¹ Economic Research Service, "Food Insecurity in the U.S.," *U.S. Department of Agriculture* (January 2025).

² Payne-Sturges et al., "Student Hunger on Campus: Food Insecurity Among College Students and Implications for Academic Institutions," *American Journal of Health Promotion* (July 2017).

³ Livingston, Carolyn, "Response to CSA Resolution on Food Insecurity," *Carleton College* (November 2024), <https://www.carleton.edu/president/news/response-to-csa-resolution-on-food-insecurity/>.

⁴ Student activities fees that went unused during COVID, around \$300,000 when money was allocated.

salads and sandwiches from Sayles by selling them to students out of vending machines located in Sayles Hill Campus Center, the Recreation Center, and the Anderson Science Complex. Each floor of Myers was allotted two communal cooking kits. Each cooking kit had one saucepan, frying pan, and a mix of cooking utensils like spatulas and ladles. These were intended for continued use throughout the summer. Bon Appetit, Carleton's catering provider, hosted two cooking demonstrations over the summer.

Data and Methodology

The principal dataset relied on for this assessment was the 2025 Food Insecurity Summer Survey (FISS25). FISS25 was drafted by IFSA under the guidance of Lin Winton, director of Carleton's Quantitative Resource Center (QRC). FISS25 measured food insecurity levels, program usage, and program satisfaction of survey respondents, and provided space for qualitative input. Survey logic was implemented to ensure respondents were only answering questions which they were qualified to answer (i.e. survey respondents were asked about satisfaction with Community Meals only if they reported attending a Community Meal at least once).

FISS25 defined food insecurity for survey participants in a two part definition drawn from USDA: a) anxiety over food sufficiency or instances of disrupted food access/intake, and b) instances of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet.⁵ Data from the former was saved as a variable named "FI1" and is categorized as the "very low food security" definition, while the latter was saved as a variable named "FI2" and is categorized as the "low food security" definition, using language from USDA. To determine student satisfaction with each of the new food-access programs, respondents were prompted to choose a number between one and five that best represented their opinion with one meaning "completely dissatisfied" and five meaning "completely satisfied."

The distribution of FISS25 was led by IFSA and CSA. FISS25 was emailed to both IFSA and CSA's email lists, and IFSA and CSA held a joint dinner on October 6, 2025 to create a space for students to complete the survey and encourage a higher response rate. The final response rate for summer residents was 21%. This is well within the bounds of an effective survey. The response rate was calculated by dividing the total number of survey respondents who reported living in Northfield from the total number of summer residents provided to us by the Office of Residential Life & Housing. 83 students responded to the survey, with 64 of those students living on campus or in Northfield over the summer. While FISS25 was sent to the entire student body, resulting in a total response rate of 3.9%, this number holds little meaning as only those who were on campus at any point over the summer were encouraged to participate in the survey and survey logic ended the survey for the 19 respondents who reported living outside of Northfield.

⁵ Rabbitt, Matthew P., et al. "Food Security in the U.S. - Definitions of Food Security," *USDA Economic Research Service* (January 2025), www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.

Supplemental data included Community Meal attendance data (CMA25) recorded by Chapel Summer Justice Intern Isaac Kofsky '27. This dataset was made up of the date of each meal, content of menu, number of students in attendance, and number of leftover meals. Kofsky recorded similar usage data for the Grab&Go Food Source (GG25), including the date of each session, number of students who attended, number of items taken, and any notes that may have impacted attendance (i.e. thunderstorm or time change). Shuttle voucher data was provided by DOSO. Additional qualitative data was collected over email by Educational Associate Theo Borowski '25, and through a survey of STEM Student Research Partners led by the Integrated Center of Math and Science.

We analyzed these datasets with R, a common programming language taught in Carleton Statistics and methods (such as Political Science methods) courses.

Survey Results

79% of survey respondents reported being food insecure, with 57% of respondents reporting severe food insecurity.

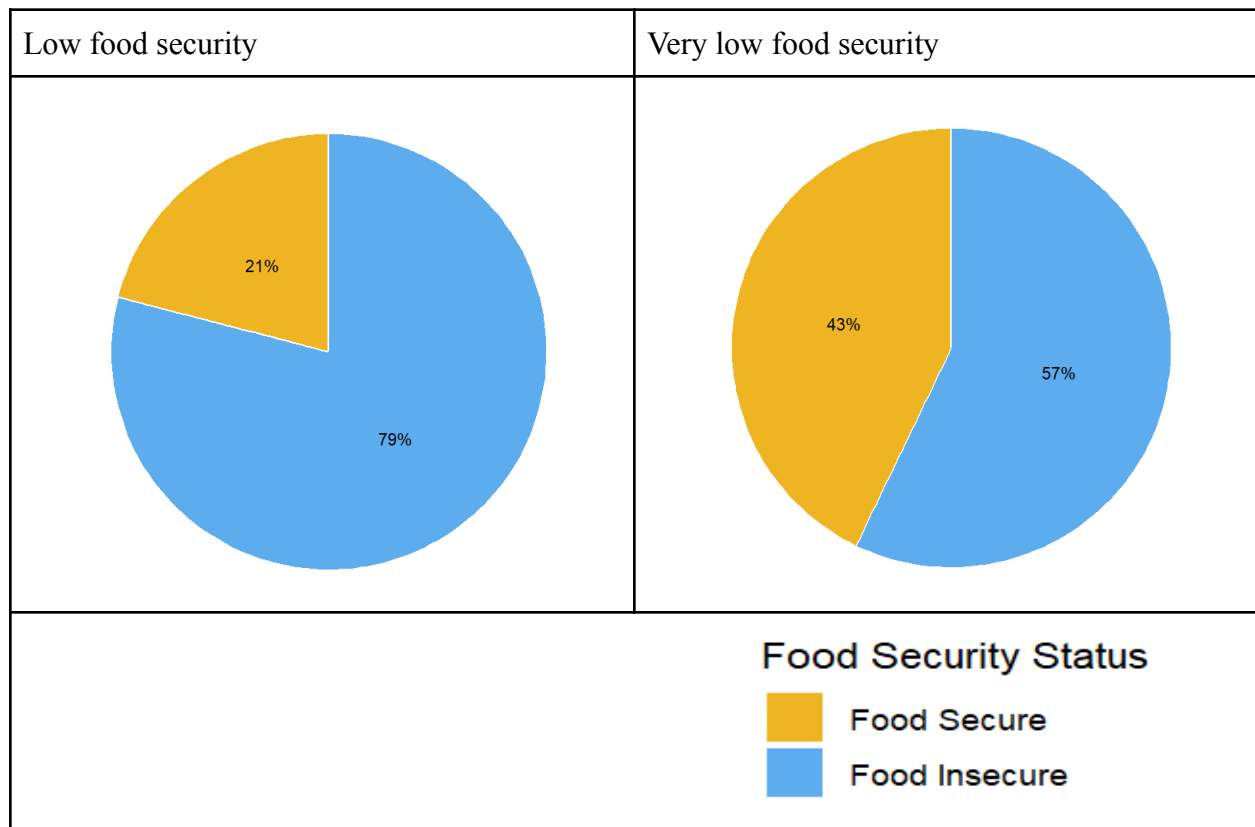


Figure 1. Food insecurity in summer Carleton student residents, split by definition.

Most students listed multiple barriers as contributing to their food insecurity. Almost 35 survey respondents found the limited kitchen capacity, described as “inadequate space to store/cook food,” impacted their food insecurity. 31 survey respondents attributed their food insecurity, at least in part, to an inability to “afford to eat consistently/nutritiously.” The inability to “get to an affordable grocery store” and lack of knowledge on “how to cook affordably/nutritiously,” captured in the bars labeled “Transportation” and “Skill,” respectively, were the final two factors measured. Transportation was a barrier listed by 24 students, and 16 students listed skill.

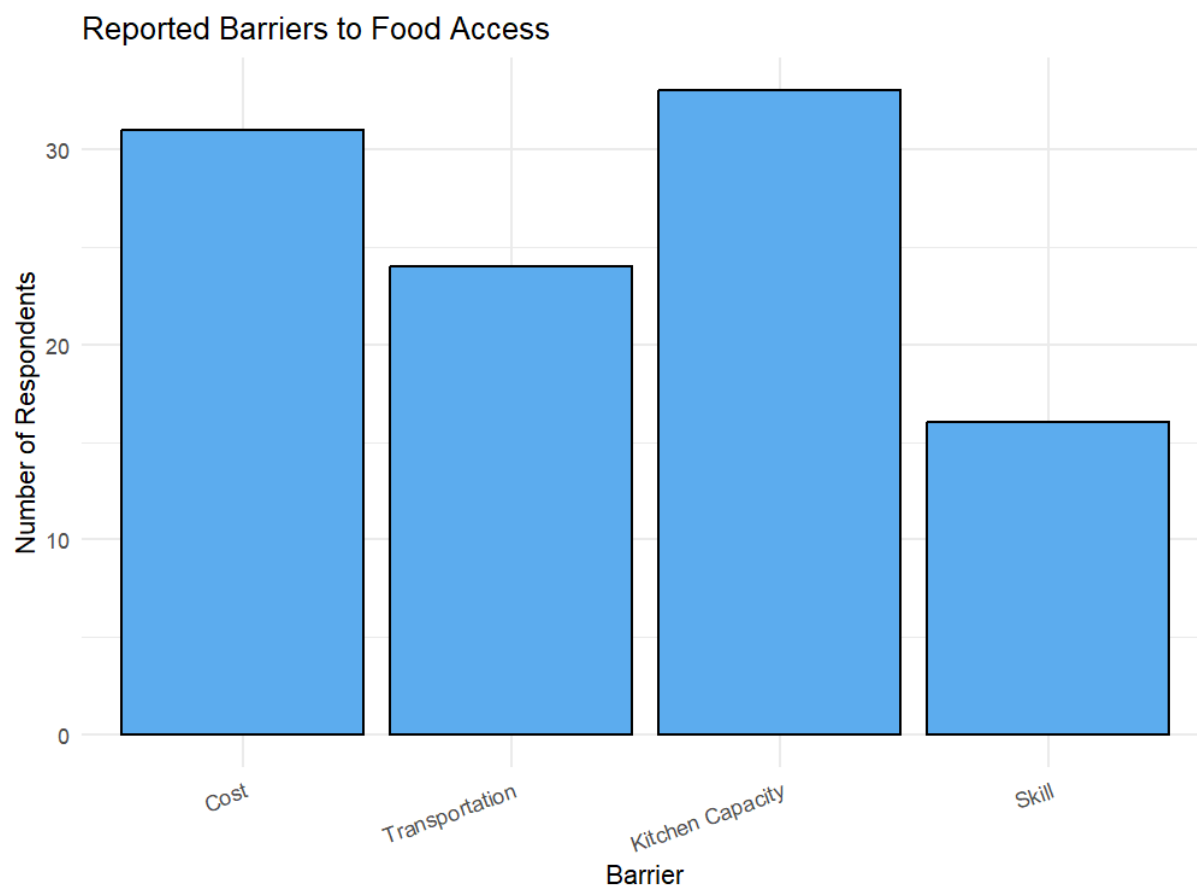


Figure 2. Barriers impacting students who reported being food insecure by either definition.

Community Meals were highly attended, with a high of 92 and a low of 20 attendees. The median attendance for Community Meals was 50, and the mean was 53. Community Meal attendance varied based on the shifting landscape of who was staying on campus. Attendance tapered off significantly towards the end of the summer as summer research ended and students went home.

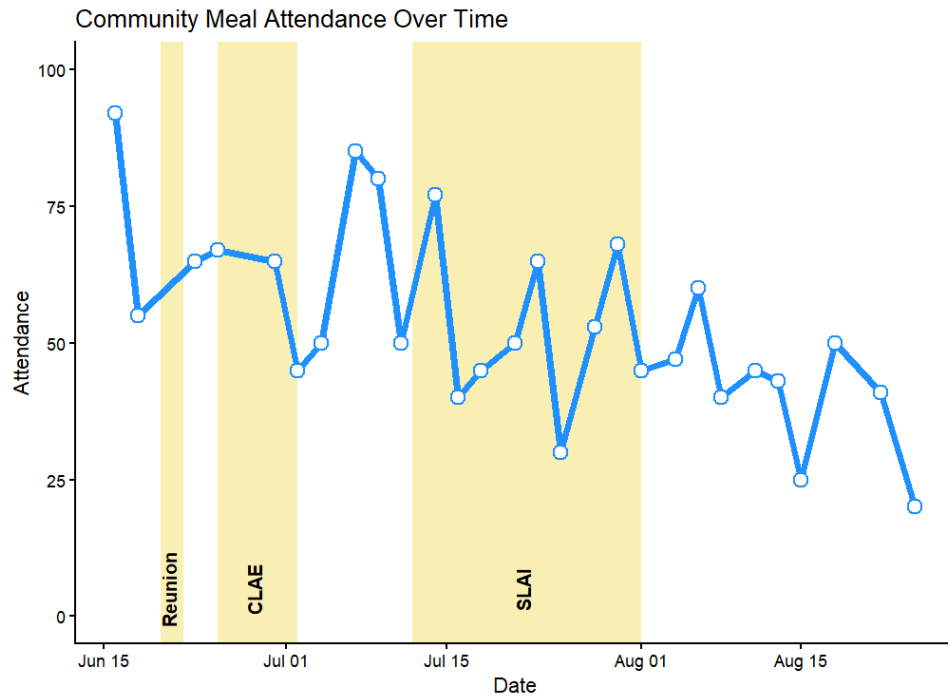


Figure 3. Number of students at Community Meals graphed over time with significant campus events highlighted.

Based on observations that Friday Community Meals were less attended, we were compelled to create a frequency plot grouping attendance by weekday in an attempt to understand the many peaks and valleys in Fig. 3. This revealed that there was a consistent and significant decrease in attendance at Community Meals over the summer on Fridays. While average attendance of Community Meals on Mondays and Wednesdays fell just below 60, the average attendance of Community Meals on Fridays barely broke 40.

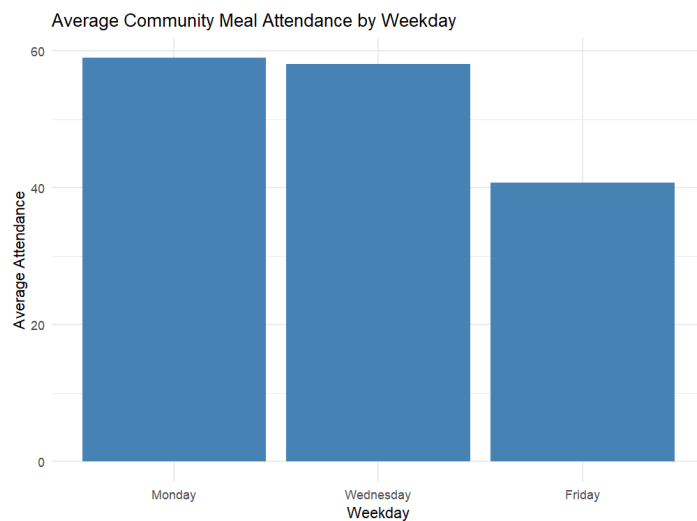


Figure 4. Average attendance of Community Meals split by day of the week.

The Grab&Go Food Source was used most during the days leading up to Reunion, after which attendance remained consistently between 10 and 20 students. There was a slight uptick during SLAI, and a downward trend towards the end of the summer.

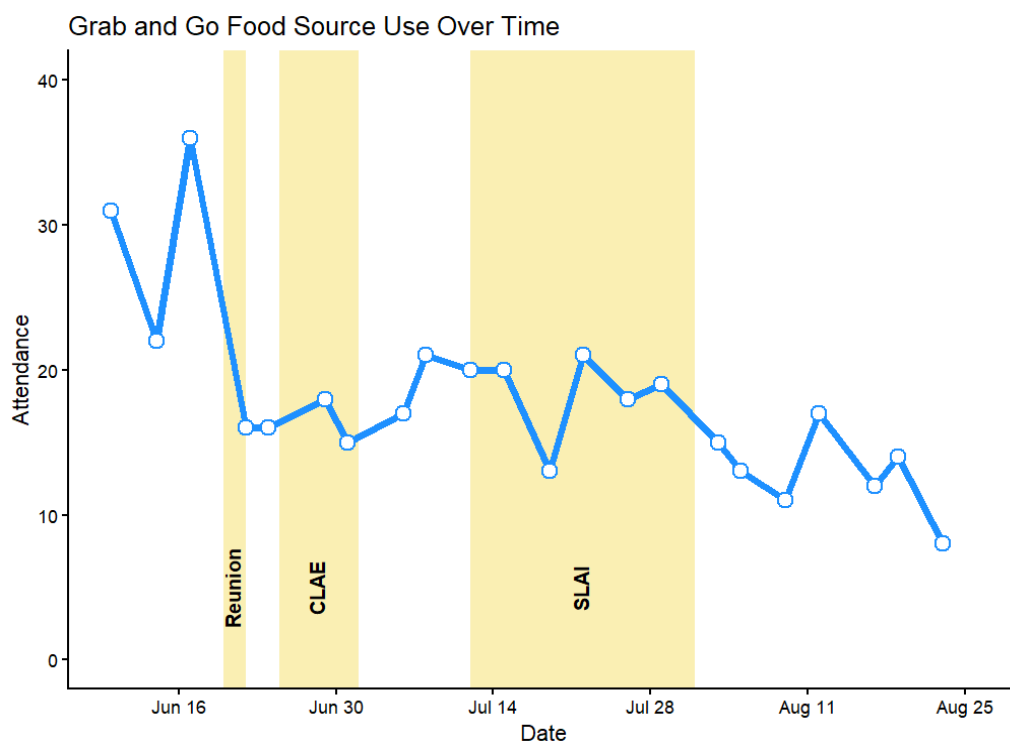


Figure 5. Number of students at the Grab&Go Food Source graphed over time with significant campus events highlighted.

Student satisfaction differed dramatically by program. As usage of programs was not universal, the number of respondents qualified to rate a given program was similarly varied. Therefore, one cannot merely compare average satisfaction levels of each program and in-depth data analysis is needed to compare programs. With these caveats in mind, Community Meals received substantially higher responses (52 respondents) and ratings (50 respondents choosing a 4 or higher) than any other program. The Grab&Go Food Source received less and milder feedback, with just 20 respondents choosing a 4 or higher. Six respondents ranked shuttle vouchers at a 4 or higher, only three ranked Fresh Vending at a 4 or higher, 16 ranked cooking kits at a 4 or higher, and four respondents ranked cooking demonstrations at 4 (there were no higher rankings).

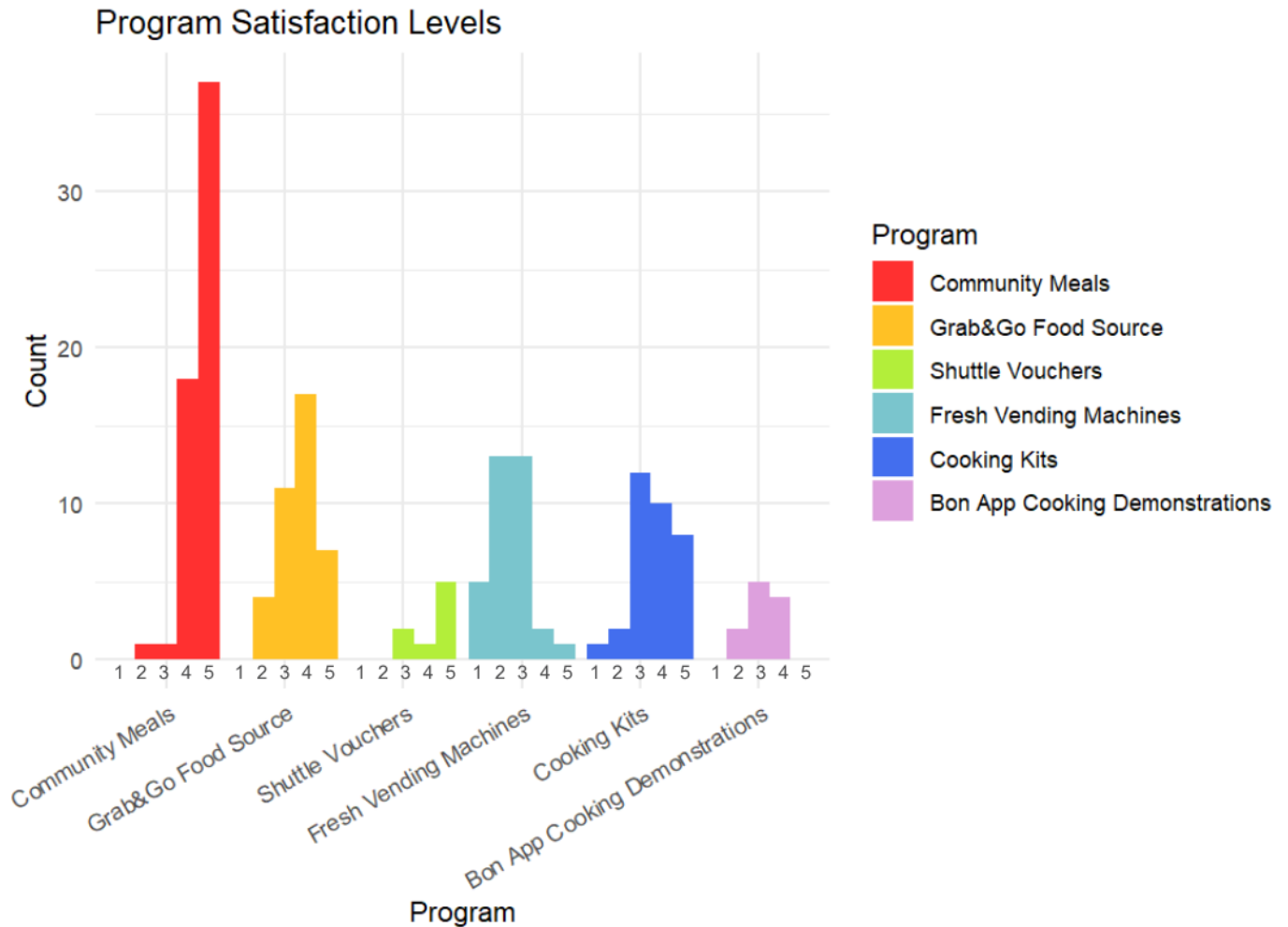


Figure 6. Count of student responses at each satisfaction level split by program.

In considering Carleton's responsibility to its students, we found an association between students receiving aid and being food insecure. With a p -value of 0.014, this association is statistically significant. Small p -values ($p < 0.05$) indicate that there is a very low chance that this result could have occurred without the null hypothesis (students receiving aid are more likely to be food insecure) being true.

Association between Food Insecurity* and Aid Status

*conservative food insecurity definition

<i>Food Security</i>	<i>Financial Aid</i>		<i>Total</i>
	Not Receiving Aid	Receiving Aid	
Secure	14 66.7 %	13 31.7 %	27 43.5 %
Insecure	7 33.3 %	28 68.3 %	35 56.5 %
<i>Total</i>	21 100 %	41 100 %	62 100 %

$$\chi^2=5.555 \cdot df=1 \cdot \phi=0.334 \cdot \text{Fisher's } p=0.014$$

Figure 7. Association table between food security and financial aid status.

Student feedback

...on Community Meals

Students' comments on Community Meals supported the quantitative finding of high satisfaction, remarking that Community Meals were “fantastic,” “critically helpful,” “a huge help,” “really awesome,” and “perfect.” A few commented on the struggle to accurately gauge how much food would be needed. Students also emphasized the need for greater staffing of Community Meals, with many highlighting their appreciation for Kofsky as well as worry that it was too much work for one person. Multiple students mentioned how Community Meals met both nutritional and social/emotional needs by providing food and bringing people together, with one respondent writing, “[Community Meals] were great at providing community in a place that can feel very isolating during the summer.”

...on the Grab&Go Food Source

Students felt disappointed with the options offered at the Grab&Go Food Source. Almost all feedback focused on the limited variety and low nutritional value of food. Students highlighted fresh food, milk, bread, eggs, produce, and protein as valuable additions in the future.

...on the Shuttle vouchers

Feedback on shuttle vouchers were limited and no clear theme arose. One respondent wrote, “a bus which comes at set times during the weekend is easier as opposed to having to schedule the shuttle.” One respondent wished the vouchers were anonymous, while another found the vouchers hard to access. Lastly, a student wished the voucher program had started earlier in the

summer.

...on the Fresh Vending machines

Fresh Vending machines scored lowest on satisfaction quantitatively, and this was reflected in the feedback given. Price, quality, and overall knowledge of the program impacted student satisfaction. Multiple respondents found the items in Fresh Vending machines to be overpriced, with one remarking that they only used Fresh Vending as a last resort because it was “too expensive.” Another group of respondents did not know about the program, or did not know how to work the machines, both of which prohibited their use of the program.

...on the cooking demonstrations

Many students lacked knowledge of the Bon App cooking demonstrations, while those that did go (4 students, only one of whom went to both) wanted the program to be “more hands on” and vegetarian friendly.

...on the cooking kits

The vast majority of respondents either did not know that cooking kits were available, or did not know which specific items in the dorm kitchens were available as part of the cooking kits due to insufficient labeling. Many respondents remarked that “it wasn’t clear” which dishes made up cooking kits, and which dishes belonged to students. Of those that knew which dishes to use, cutting boards, knives, and baking sheets were identified as items useful to add in the future.

Insight from an involved faculty member

Al Montero: “I have only positive things to say about the experience of handling three trips to Costco and cooking two community meals during the summer. It was a pleasure to do all of this and I did not consider it work, but community participation in the collective welfare of students living on campus. I must also say that I love to cook for a large number of people. It really challenges my culinary creativity! The facilities at the MCC are first-rate and very comfortable for supporting community meals. It was great to have some student volunteers help out, especially with clean-up. That might become more formalized so that every community meal has enough support to clean up and allow folks to go home pretty soon after finishing. Ideally, too, there should be one or two student coordinators during the summer who are remunerated for their time and organization to make the whole system work well. The Excel sheets allowed me to monitor what was going on and when things needed to be done, but that requires someone to coordinate and organize.”

Discussion and Conclusion

This survey data shows that there is a need for programming addressing food insecurity at Carleton over the summer. Over three-quarters of respondents reported some level of food insecurity at some point during the summer, for a variety of reasons. The many different causes

of food insecurity require holistic, multi-pronged solutions. While the programming implemented over the summer of 2025 was helpful, it did not fully alleviate the food-access issues that Carleton students faced.

It is clear that students believe these programs are valuable. The gratitude for these programs cannot be overstated. Many students expressed their enthusiastic appreciation — with all-caps, exclamation points, repetition, or all three. Multiple students specifically requested for these programs, or similar ones, to continue in the future. They did not mince words when it came to the importance of these programs, with some clearly stating that without these programs they would have gone hungry. 29 respondents had stayed at Carleton a previous summer, and were able to compare their experiences. 68%, or 20 of the 29 students, reported 4 or higher on a 5 point scale from “much worse food access this summer” to “much better food access this summer.”

Out of all the programs offered, Community Meals received the highest levels of satisfaction and attendance. Not only did Community Meals provide nutritious meals for students who may not have eaten otherwise, this program also brought together students from across campus in a meaningful way. Students found this time to connect to be significant as summer residents are often isolated from each other during the work day.

The association table between aid and food insecurity shows that students receiving financial aid are more likely to be food insecure. This correlation suggests that Carleton’s commitment to supporting students from lower income backgrounds is well complemented by strong food programming over the summer.

Chapel-led programming was extremely cost effective. While \$27,000 was allotted, only \$5,500 was used to supply both Community Meals and the Grab&Go Food Source. That is only a fifth of what was allocated to the Office of the Chaplain. Creativity and intentional sourcing from affordable grocery stores allowed the Chapel to stretch funding further. As good stewards of Carleton’s resources, the Chapel was able to demonstrate that food access programs are much more affordable than previously estimated.

The supplementary approach of food access programs restricted certain programming in key ways, some of which were emphasized in our qualitative review, such as the lack of nutritious food in the Grab&Go Food Source. This begs the question, must these programs be designed to be solely supplementary? An examination of Carleton’s values to determine the extent Carleton wants to take responsibility for its food insecure students may prove to be useful.

Opportunities to Explore

- First and foremost, we recommend offering educational programming for the Carleton community on food insecurity, its causes and specifically food insecurity within the context of higher education. There are a plethora of scholarly articles⁶ on the subject validating the presence of food insecurity on college campuses. It should not be the responsibility of food insecure students to educate their community to legitimize their lived experience. Destigmatization of food insecurity is a critical first step in addressing the issue and empowering food insecure students to use the resources Carleton provides.
- A top complaint across programs was the lack of clear communication. Multiple students simply did not know of certain programs (particularly when it came to cooking demonstrations and kits). Knowledge of programs also varied in degree, with low knowledge of programs limiting students' confidence in engaging with them (like Fresh Vending machines and cooking kits). More direct and accessible communication would ensure programs are used to their full potential. Deeper integration of programs with college communication infrastructure like Residential Life could facilitate this in future summers.
- Particularly in regards to Community Meals, students emphasized the need for increased staffing. Students recognized the effort it took to cook for upwards of 50 people three times a week and advocated for more than one Chapel intern to take charge of this undertaking. While increased staffing is necessary, it should not come at the sacrifice of the culture of Community Meals. Students enjoyed the laid back, casual atmosphere cultivated by student staffing.
- The biggest room for improvement identified by students was in the Grab&Go Food Source. Students appreciated the Grab&Go Food Source, but would have found it more helpful had it included perishable food with greater nutritional value. Even if the Grab&Go remains strictly supplemental, we recommend considering more nutritious options like milk and produce, as the cheap non-perishables offered this summer were often similar to what financially stressed students were already buying.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who supported efforts during the 2024-2025 school year to advocate for and plan programming addressing summer food insecurity at Carleton, especially the IFSA Faculty and Staff group. We are thankful for the collaboration of the Carleton Student Association (CSA) for their financial sponsorship of this summer's programs, and for their advocacy in making this

⁶ Loofbourrow, Brittany M, and Rachel E Scherr. "Food Insecurity in Higher Education: A Contemporary Review of Impacts and Explorations of Solutions." *International journal of environmental research and public health* vol. 20,10 5884. 19 May. 2023, doi:10.3390/ijerph20105884.

summer possible. We appreciate the support from the Office of the Chaplain, and Chaplain Schuyler Vogel's guidance. Thank you to the Division of Inclusion, Equity, and Community, as well as Vice President Zavala, for their steadfast support and advocacy.. Thank you to President Byerly for holding space for student advocacy in addressing food insecurity concerns in our community.

We are deeply grateful to all those involved in executing summer programming. Students greatly enjoyed the Community Meals held by the Alumni Relations Office under Michael Thompson's leadership. Community Meals also received invaluable support from members of All Saints Episcopal Church. We appreciate the many members of the Division of Student Life and the Dean of Student's Office for their administration of the ride vouchers, cooking kits, and emergency funding systems, in addition to providing additional refrigerators and stoves in Myers Hall. This summer's programming would also not have been possible without so many members of our IFSA Faculty and Staff support group providing rides, completing grocery shopping, and helping with community meals. The physical location of the Multicultural Center offered both a state of the art kitchen for the cooks of the community meal, as well as a consistent and welcoming space for all meal attendees. Dacie Moses house was another incredible partner during the summer, hosting one meal each week and generously serving as an alternate location when the Multicultural Center was not an option. Chapel summer employees helped steward these programs with efficiency and leadership.

We are especially grateful to Sebass Cherian, Chance Tunnissen, and Christa Carlson for their on-the-ground support over the summer. We are deeply thankful to Theo Borowski, who served as the architect of this report and worked closely with faculty, staff, and student colleagues to create it. Of course, none of this summer's programming would have been possible without the work of Isaac Kofsky, the Chapel Summer Justice Intern. Isaac's countless hours spent cooking, cleaning, shopping, and supporting summer Carls mark an immense dedication and passion for this community and this project. His work helped so many summer Carls, and leaves an excellent example for future leaders of these programs. Our greatest thanks to all of these folks, and more, who lent their efforts and support to this summer programming.

We would also like to thank the Carleton Summer community. Students who showed up to community meals, told their friends about the resources available through these programs, and filled out the FISS25 are at the heart of this program. Without their cooperation and support, none of this work would have mattered.

A final thank you to those who lent their expertise to ensure proper methodology was followed to create this report. Lin Winton's insights into survey design, Ryan Dawkin's knowledge of R and data analysis, and Erica Zweifel's perspective from a community advocacy lens were all instrumental in the completion of this report. Thank you all.