Strategic Food Sourcing Data Insights & Qualitative Report
Campus Pantries
July - December 2024

Between March and May 2025, FFEN conducted 5 strategic food sourcing consultations with College Campus Food Pantries, drawing on food sourcing and service data from July–December 2024. Discussions focused on sourcing practices, financial planning, and operational models. This report synthesizes key findings, highlights exceptional practices, identifies challenges, and outlines actionable recommendations for navigating current and future constraints.

The information below was gathered pre-report creation from 13 campus pantries and further defined in the 5 Strategic Food Sourcing Consultation sessions held with campus pantry and FFEN staff.

Profile

Scope

- 13 Campus Pantries signed up for a report and submitted key characteristic information.
- 5 participated in consultations with FFEN staff
- 5 participated in the Campus Pantry Leader Cohort in 2024

Service Models

- 12 sites (92%) offer **full shopper choice** (compared to 76% from statewide data insights - 68 responses)
- 10 sites (77%) offer access **weekly or more frequently** (compared to 32% from statewide data insights)

Outstanding Achievements

Nutritious Food Distribution Excellence

Campus food shelves continue to exceed standards in distributing high-priority items like produce, protein, and dairy including one site that had 65% of its inventory “most important food” categories. Sites commonly used $0-priced items and TEFAP to maintain quality and nutritional value.

Community-Centered Service
All food shelves participating in the consultation offer full-choice models, with creative adaptations for their specific populations. These include student-focused services like extended or flexible hours and unstaffed models with key card access—making food more available when and where students need it.

Data-Driven Operations
Most sites are sharing data with staff and volunteers and using FFEN dashboards or sourcing reports to inform decisions. This transparency helps improve planning and accountability, even for small or resource-limited teams.

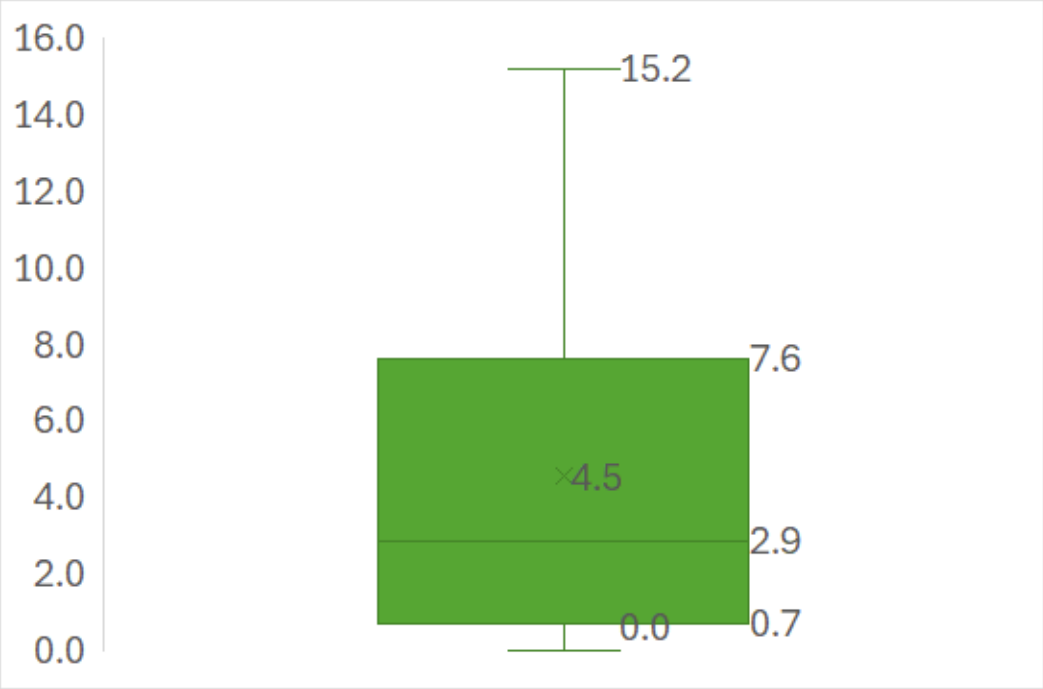
Key Challenges

Financial Constraints
Rising food costs—especially for protein and dairy—combined with potential federal funding cuts in 2025–26 present significant risks. While fundraising is recommended across the board, few sites are actively building toward more sustainable funding.

Operational Limitations
Smaller teams report challenges in tracking data, experimenting with sourcing strategies, and maintaining shopper-centered standards during periods of high demand. Time constraints and limited staff capacity frequently limit innovation.

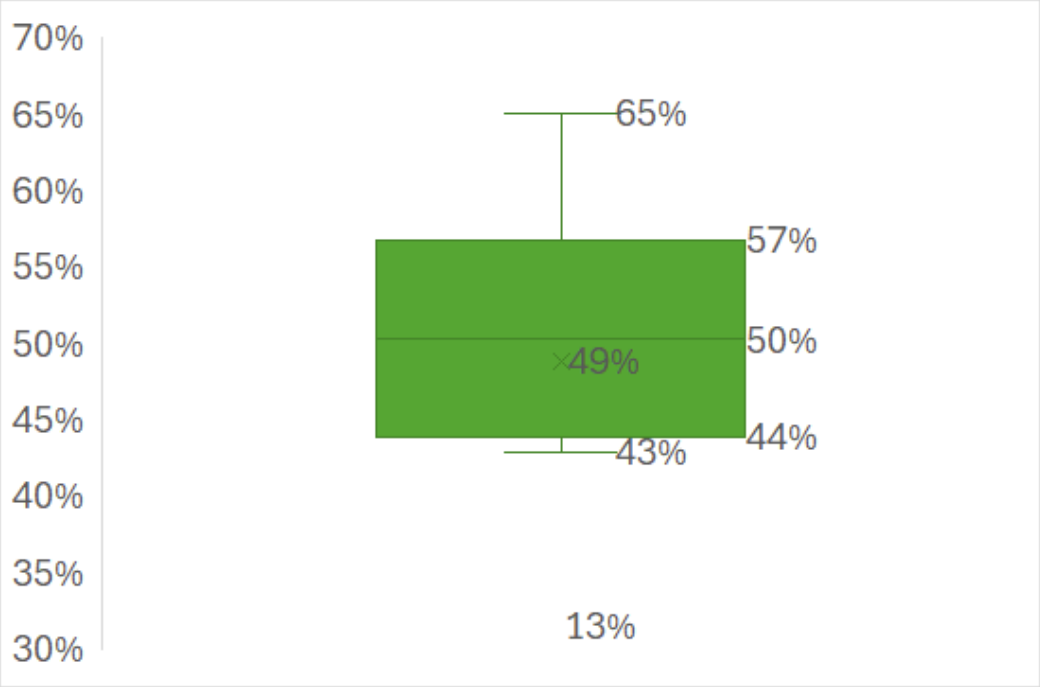
Data Insights

Pounds Distributed per Individual per Visit



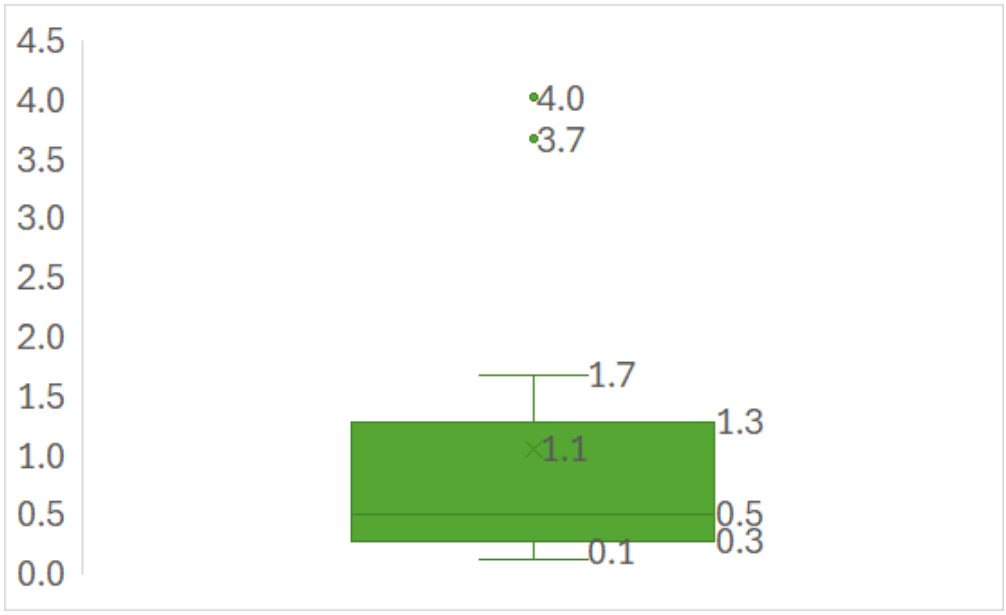
Campus Pantries often allow more frequent visits than community food shelves and students are utilizing the pantry for a variety of reasons. While some are getting food to take home and make into a meal, others are grabbing snacks or smaller amounts of food to consume during their day on campus. This explains why the pounds distributed per individual per visit median is significantly lower than the statewide median of 19.3 lbs.

Most Important Foods: Percent of Pounds Sourced



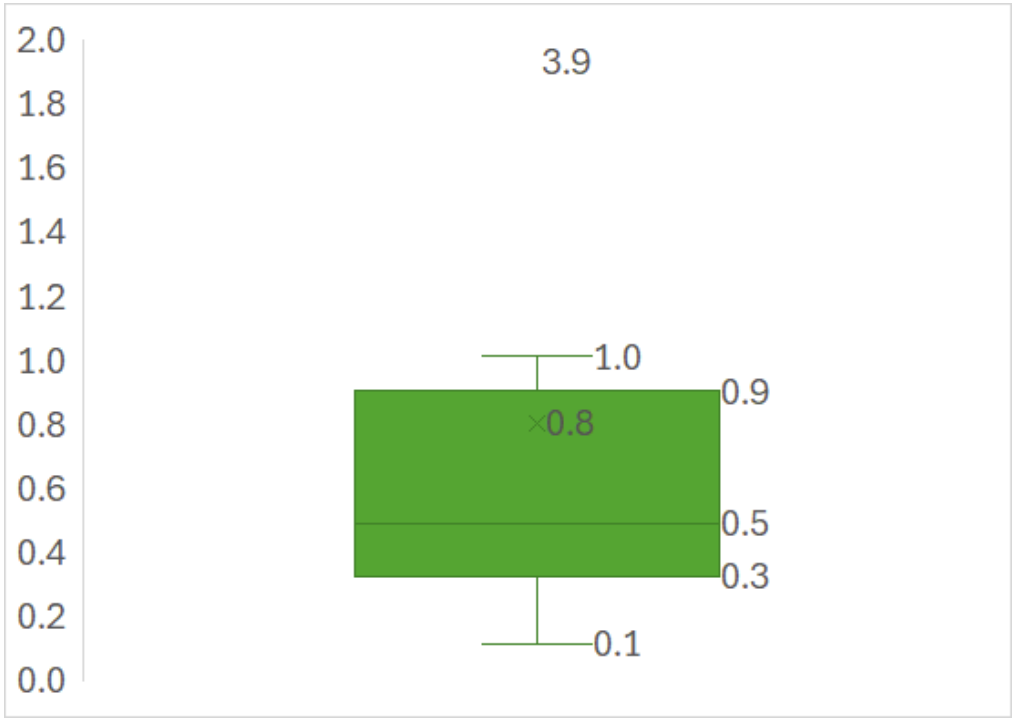
Campus Pantries tend to stock a greater amount of ready to eat foods as compared to community food pantries. The statewide median for percentage of pounds sourced in the most important foods is 57%; the lower median for campus food pantries exists because of their emphasis on ready to eat foods and pre-packed meals.

Most Important Foods: Pounds sourced per individual per visit of Produce



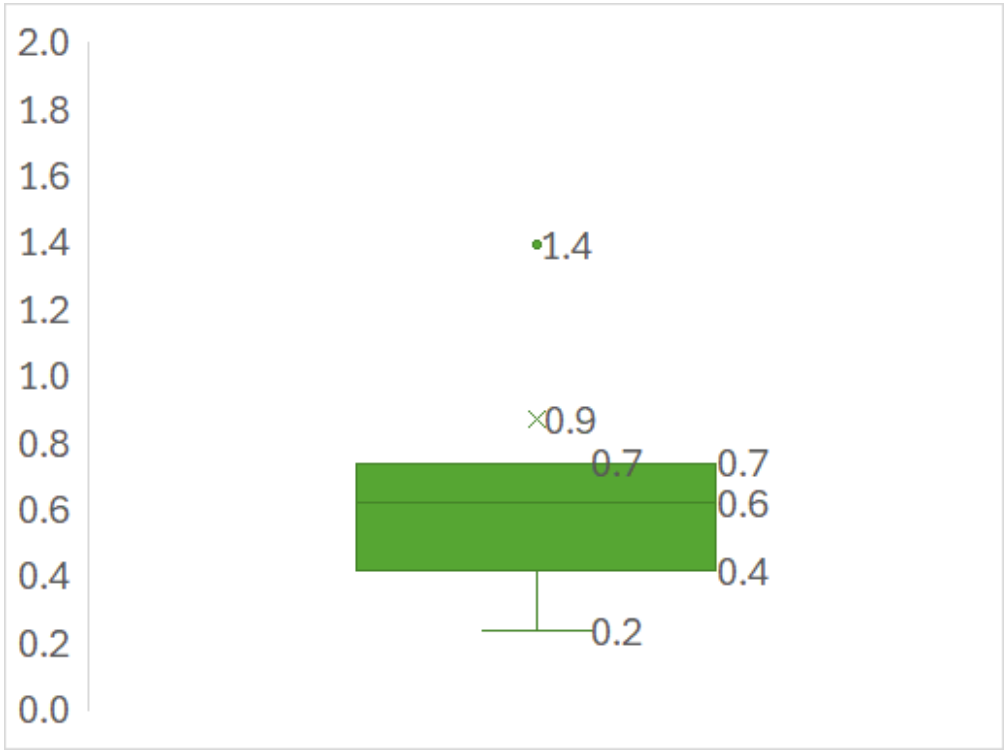
Given that the median pounds per individual distributed per visit is 2.9 pounds, the median for pounds sourced per individual per visit of produce is actually a similar percentage (*median of* .5 lbs, 17%) to what we see at community food pantries (*median of* 4.6 lbs, 23%). However, we do also know that campus pantries face challenges in having the space to store fresh produce.

Most Important Foods: Pounds sourced per individual per visit of Dairy



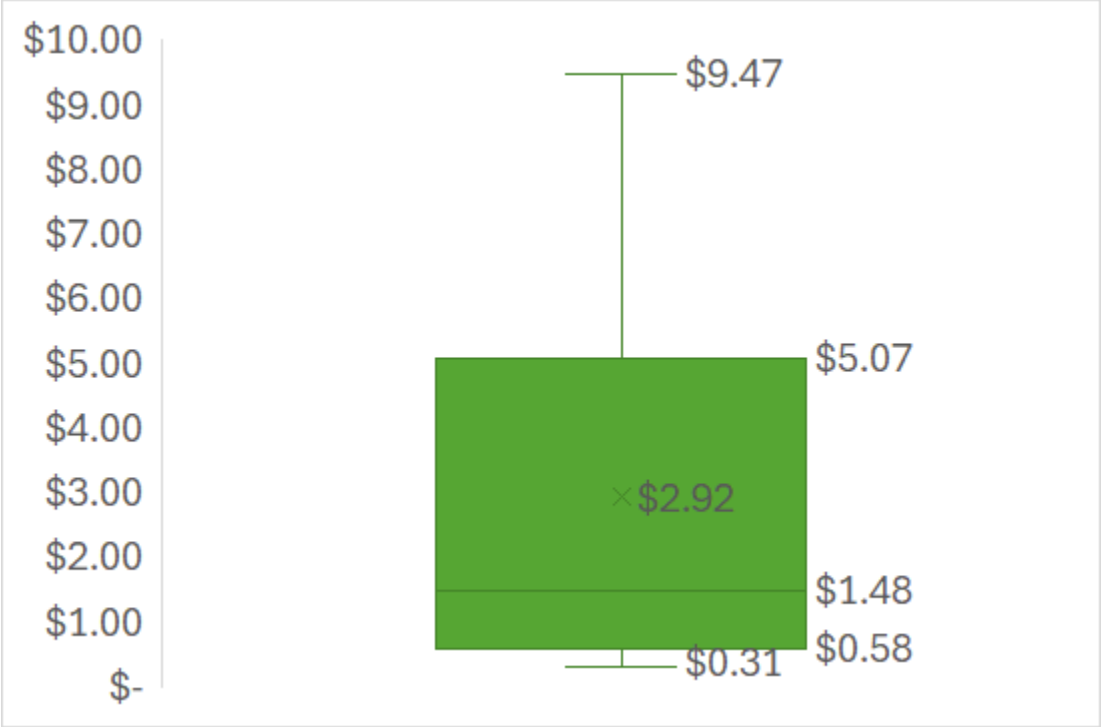
Dairy pounds actually make up a larger portion (17%) of total pounds distributed per individual per visit at campus pantries as compared to community food shelves (median of 2.1 lbs, 11%).

Most Important Foods: Pounds sourced per individual per visit of Protein



Again, protein pounds make up a larger portion (21%) of total pounds distributed per individual per visit at campus pantries as compared to community food shelves (median of 2.4 lbs, 12%).

Cost Per Individual per Visit



Campus Pantries spend significantly less than community food shelves (median of $2.39) per individual served, due to the lower poundage per individual per visit.

Conclusion

Campus food shelves are showing impressive resilience and adaptability. They're distributing nutritious food, designing inclusive and accessible service models, and applying data where possible. FFEN will continue to support these efforts with targeted tools, strategic insights, and consultation to build sustainability, equity, and dignity in college hunger relief.

Statewide Strategic Food Sourcing Insights:

- Total food shelf sites participating: 153
    - Participating Food Shelf Characteristics
- FFEN Strategic Food Sourcing Metrics - Definitions and Uses
- Strategic Food Sourcing: Food Categories
- Statewide Data insights webinar recording & slide deck