Food insecurity is a very real problem at colleges and universities across the United States. Iowa State University is not exempt from this challenge, but is using data to better define the issue and multiple actions to address the problem.

In a November 2019 survey, undergraduate and graduate/professional students were asked among other things, to indicate how true the following two questions were for them:

1. I worried about my food running out before I had money to buy more.
2. The food I bought just didn’t last and I didn’t have money to get more.

Taken together, the two statements comprise the USDA’s food insecurity screening tool (short form). For ISU students, 25.8% were identified as being food insecure. The issue was greater for multicultural students, 35.2% and students identifying as LGBTQIA+. (For reference, around 43% of college students nationally and around 15.5% of Story County residents are food insecure.)

The Division of Student Affairs at Iowa State University has worked with several initiatives in an effort to increase food security on campus.

Give A Swipe is an emergency food access program launched in January of 2018 from students request to increase food security for their peers. Students are able to donate a combination of ISU Dining Flex Meals or Dining Dollars to other students in need of meal assistance due to hardship. To date, over 200 meals have been distributed.

Several departments on campus, including Office of Student Assistance, Student Wellness, Office of Student Financial Aid, International Students and Scholars Office, and Student Counseling Services help identify students in need to receive these meals. Meal swipes are added to a student’s ISU card, and staff provide education regarding campus and community resources for sustained food access. For more information visit dining.iastate.edu/nutrition/give-a-swipe.
ISU Dining and the Department of Residence worked in spring 2020 to set up a food pantry in the West Side Market in the Union Drive Community Center. Students and their families were able to access free, healthy, fresh and non-perishable food. Campus dietitians created recipe cards to help those using the pantry develop meal ideas using food pantry products.

Student Health and Wellness conducted a comprehensive review of national university-based programs that address food security and divided them into low/no cost, moderate cost, and high cost.

A division-wide food drive was initiated in Student Affairs to create more awareness of The SHOP and encourage staff to make donations.

ISU Dining is establishing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit acceptance at all retail locations.

An ISU Foundation account has been established that directly links to resourcing The SHOP.

Three grocery locations were identified that provide free delivery of purchases exceeding $100. This reduces student time commitment and allows customization of purchases to supplement donated items. Additional inquiry is being made for possible discounts and additional retail locations.

Student Health and Wellness added custom questions to their biennial participation in the National College Health Assessment to gather data on food security. Work is also in process to add screening questions for health center and counseling intake screenings.

To support The SHOP and other efforts focused on alleviating food insecurity, visit https://fundisu.foundation.iastate.edu/project/20443.