

Research Brief

CalFresh Enrollments in Humboldt County 2014-2024

Jason Whisler, M.A.

jason.labor@law.ucdavis.edu

Marcos Lopez, Ph.D.

marcos.labor@law.ucdavis.edu

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In November 2025, Californians entered a new era of food insecurity. The pause in funding for CalFresh (federally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) due to the federal budget shutdown temporarily cut off \$5.7 million in monthly assistance to beneficiaries experiencing food insecurity in Humboldt County alone. This financial hit to low-wage recipients, along with rising food prices and reduced federal spending on emergency food distribution, deepened food insecurity and highlighted the precarious nature of food access Californians regularly experience. Although the November federal government shutdown ended, many factors that contribute to food insecurity in California and Humboldt County remain.

The goal of this research brief is to provide stakeholders, such as policymakers, public health officials, and food security advocates, with an overview of CalFresh usage and identify age-specific populations where food insecurity is most concentrated. This brief identifies the distribution of CalFresh enrollments in Humboldt County and further disaggregates beneficiaries by age group from 2014 to 2024.¹

With the passage of federal H.R. 1, SNAP programs, such as CalFresh, face the most severe cuts in both eligibility and funding in the program's history, while also shifting billions in costs to states and counties. This research brief shows rising CalFresh enrollment, indicating an increased number of people vulnerable to food insecurity due to cuts to food assistance programs. As previously reported by the UC Davis Labor and Community Center, the March 2023 rollback of the COVID-era CalFresh expansion reduced benefits for recipients. As a result of that rollback, Food for People, the Humboldt County Food Bank, reported a 31% increase, from approximately 16,000 to 21,000 people served per month.² In addition to the 2025 government shutdown and the forthcoming H.R. 1-mandated cuts, the USDA also recently threatened to withhold SNAP benefits from states, including California, that do not comply with its demand to hand over data on SNAP enrollees, including immigration-related codes.

In 2024, the CalFresh enrollment rate in Humboldt County reached 22.4%, outpacing the statewide average in California of 14.3% [see Chart 1]. **In 2014, Humboldt County had the 19th-highest CalFresh enrollment rate among California's 58 counties, but by 2024 it had risen to 9th in the state.** From 2014 to 2024, Humboldt County has surpassed the statewide average in enrollment rates across all age groups, with the 18 to 59 age group showing the most significant discrepancy. Over 1 in 4 children in Humboldt County (28.4%) were enrolled in CalFresh in 2024, along with over 1 in 6 seniors age 60+ (17.5%).

¹ California Department of Social Services, CalFresh Data Dashboard, Raw Data, Updated 11/6/2025:

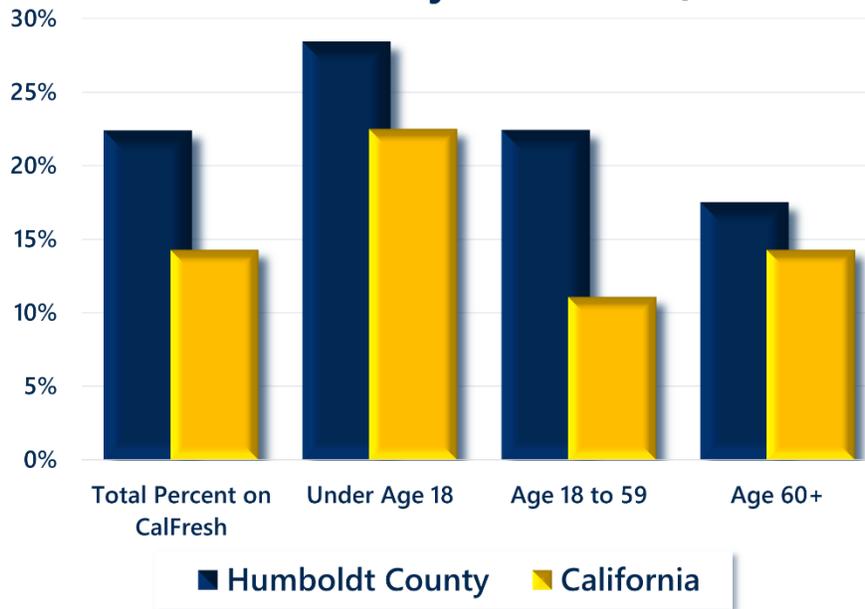
<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/data-portal/research-and-data/calfresh-data-dashboard>.

² Lopez, Marcos and Jason Whisler. "Food Access in Four California Counties: An Analysis of the USDA's Food Access Research Atlas." UC Davis Labor and Community Center of the Greater Capital Region. May 2025.

<https://law.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk10866/files/inline-files/Food-Access-in-Four-California-Counties.pdf>.

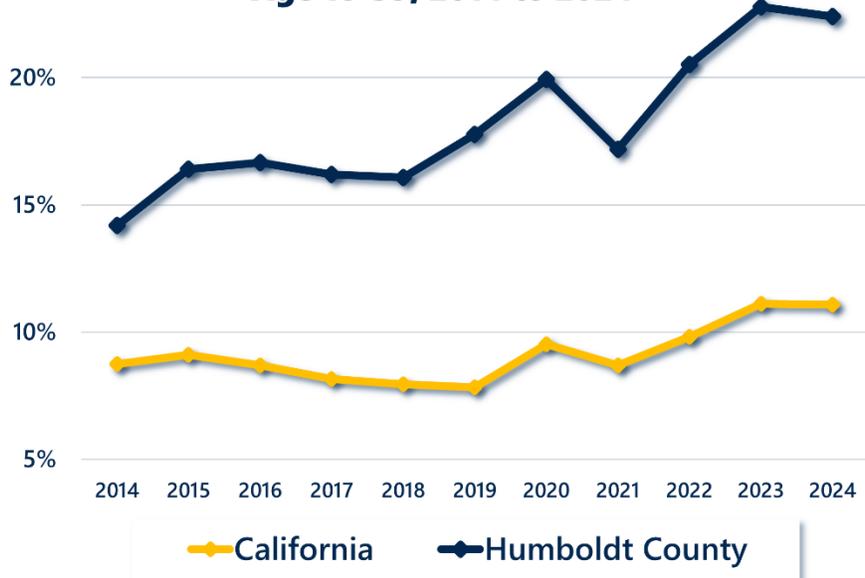
Food for People, The Food Bank for Humboldt County. "2023 Fast Facts." Foodforpeople.org.

Chart 1. Percent of Residents on CalFresh in Humboldt County and Statewide, 2024



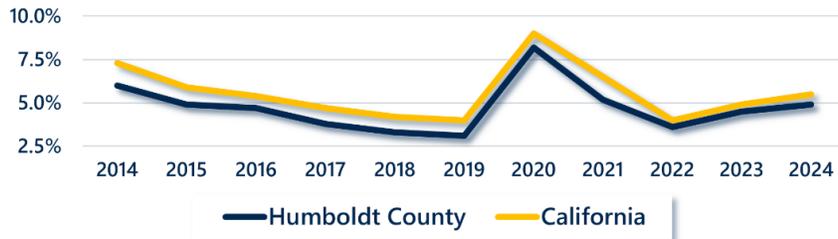
Statewide, the CalFresh enrollment rate for the 18 to 59 population was 11.1% in 2024. In contrast, 22.4% in that age group were enrolled in Humboldt County, more than twice the state average [see Chart 2]. Enrollment in Humboldt County increased faster than statewide from 2014 to 2024. Statewide, this group’s enrollment increased by 2.4% (8.7% to 11.1%), but in Humboldt County, it increased by 8.2% (14.2% to 22.4%). **Humboldt’s rank among counties with the highest enrollment rates for working-age adults rose from 16th highest in California in 2014, all the way to 5th highest in 2024.** Only three counties in the state – Lake, Mariposa, and Modoc – showed greater increases in this age group’s enrollment from 2014 to 2024.

Chart 2. CalFresh Enrollments in Humboldt County and California Age 18-59, 2014 to 2024



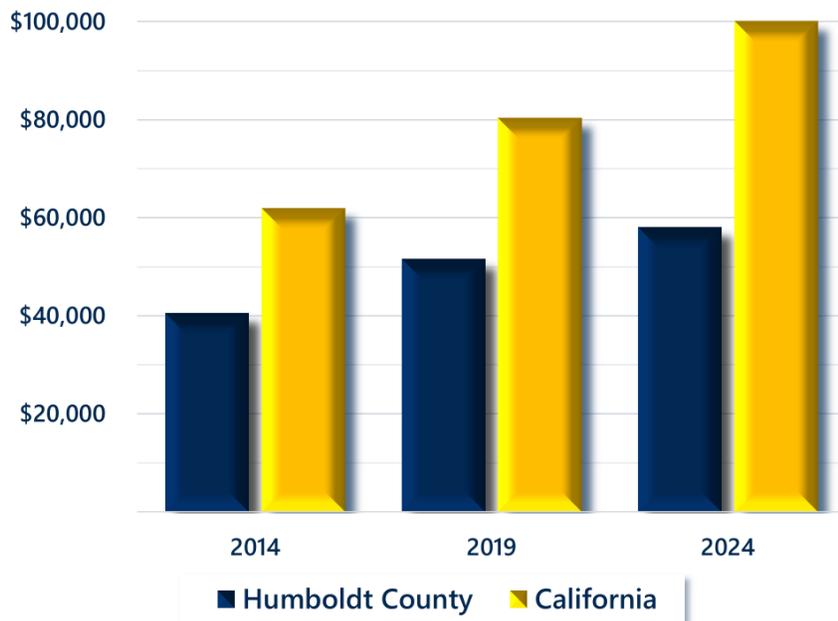
CalFresh enrollment rates tend to rise with increased unemployment. With the steep increase in CalFresh usage by working-age adults aged 18-59 in Humboldt County relative to the state, one might expect to see unemployment rates in the County rising disproportionately to the statewide rate. Instead, from 2014 to 2024, Humboldt County’s unemployment rate tracked consistently just under the statewide average [see chart 3].³

Chart 3. Unemployment Rate in September of Each Year 2014-2024



Rather than unemployment being a leading cause of increased CalFresh enrollments, data indicates that wages and incomes of those employed in Humboldt County lagged behind statewide growth – a more likely catalyst for the increased enrollments. Median household income in Humboldt County, in 2024 inflation-adjusted dollars, increased \$17,526 from 2014 to 2024, compared to a \$38,216 increase in the statewide average [see Chart 4].⁴ Humboldt County’s income growth was only 43.2% compared to 61.7% statewide.

Chart 4. Median Household Income

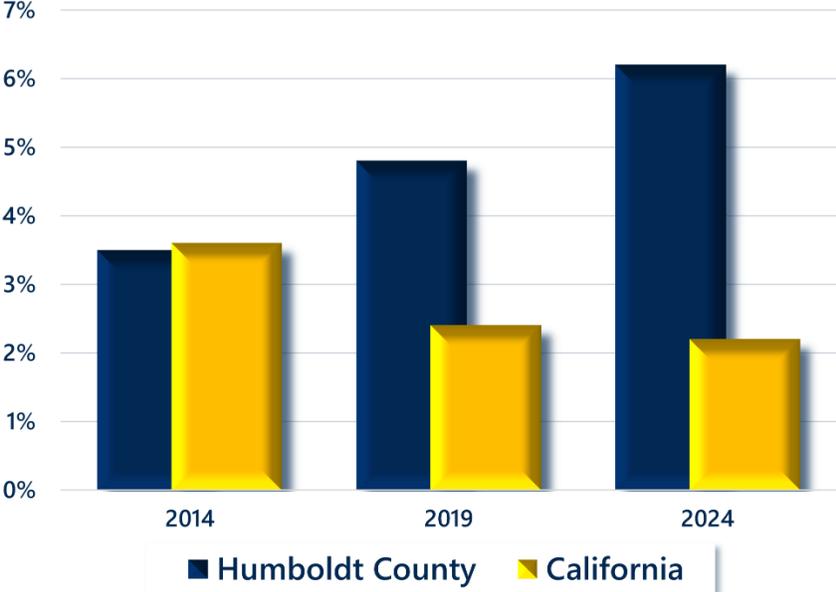


³ Employment Development Department, State of California. <https://labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/data/interactive-labor-market-data-tools.html>

⁴ US Census Bureau, “Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2024 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars),” American Community Survey, 1 Year Estimate Subject Tables, 2024. B19013.

A disproportionately high percentage of workers in Humboldt County work full-time, year-round, yet live in poverty. In 2014, this rate in Humboldt County was slightly lower than the statewide average, 3.5% versus 3.6% [see Chart 5]. In 2024, however, the statewide figure decreased to just 2.2%, while in Humboldt County it rose significantly to 6.2%.⁵

Chart 5. Percent of Full-Time, Year Round Workers Living in Poverty, 2014 to 2024



In conclusion, CalFresh enrollments in Humboldt County have increased steadily over the past 10 years, across each age bracket, and at a faster pace than California’s statewide averages. The County’s working-age adults aged 18 to 59 have the largest discrepancy in enrollment rates compared to statewide averages. While unemployment contributes to CalFresh use, in Humboldt County, the wide range of low-wage employment is insufficient for workers to afford basic necessities, such as food. Over the past 10 years, Humboldt County has fallen further behind the state of California in median household income and has seen a significant increase in the number of workers who work full-time, year-round, yet remain in poverty. As a result, Humboldt County has risen in the ranks of counties with the highest CalFresh enrollment rates. Unlike household-level reports on CalFresh, this analysis shares insight into where policy changes and/or investments could address age-specific food access needs, such as improving access to jobs that provide economic security to working adults. Our findings indicate that city-, county-, and state-level decision makers must be prepared to address the specific food access needs of nearly one-fourth of Humboldt County residents to meet the challenges posed by food insecurity compounded by federal policymaking.

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⁵ US Census Bureau, “Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months,” American Community Survey, 1 Year Estimate Subject Tables, 2024. S1701.