

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Campus Food Security Initiative




Mission: The UTRGV Campus Food Security Initiative (CFSI) aims to address food insecurity and foster healthy eating habits by creating easy access to locally grown or sourced fresh produce and plant-based products.

Background: A 2019 research study conducted by Graduate Sustainability Fellows at UTRGV indicated that about 44% of students surveyed in the study reported that they experienced hunger on an ongoing basis. The CFSI was developed to address such food insecurity and foster healthy eating habits. It was launched on April 17, 2020, in the middle of COVID-19 Pandemic, to serve the campus community. By December 2020, about 3300 people were served through weekly produce markets and fresh meals with “pay what you feel” pricing model, at the two main campuses. This model created a leveling field for faculty, staff, administrators, and students to enjoy a basket of fresh produce and delicious single-serving, plant-based meals without a fixed price tag attached to them.

Individuals Served between April –December 2020

Total People Served: 3294
 Edinburg: 1826 served (55%)
 Brownsville: 1468 served (45%)



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Fresh produce was sourced directly from the local farmers during growing season, and thereafter, through a local produce distributor during summer months. The unique advantage of CFSI is that it is a student-centered and student-driven initiative with embedded unprecedented professional development opportunities for students hired to support CFSI activities. Students majoring in diversified fields of study work in a team-centric work setting to accomplish the CFSI mission while developing technical and soft skills needed to succeed in their future career.

Student Engagement and workforce development through CFSI: Student employees create tasty and nutritious plant-based meals at the **BSM Global Blends** kitchen, under the direction of a professional chef, using seasonal & locally sourced produce. The [student Research Assistants](#) hired for this initiative work under faculty or staff advisors to learn how to prepare healthy food in the kitchen, source locally grown fresh produce, and promote CFSI activities via social media platforms and create **food demos**. These student employees engage the community in various ways. This team-centric work environment allows them to learn work skills while influencing their peers, friends and family to follow a healthy lifestyle.

Meals served between April – December 2020

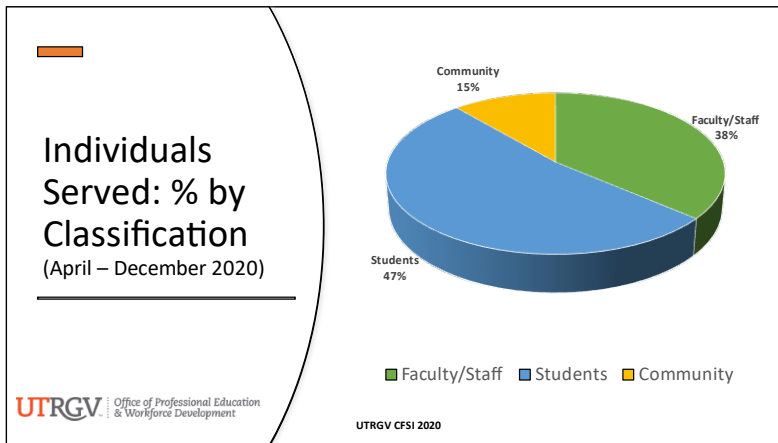
3400+ Meals Served

- 115+ meals served weekly
- Weekly menu consists of 3-4 freshly prepared meals, using produce items distributed that week.



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These weekly produce market also provided ample opportunities for student organizations to display homemade healthy, and delicious plant-based snacks to raise funds for their organization.



About 50% of the individuals served from April 2020 – December 2020 were students, with about 38% faculty/staff and 15% larger community members making up the rest.

Current scope of CFSI: Starting March 2021, CFSI included outreach activities to engage the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) community and educate people to incorporate plant-based food and fresh produce, in addition to addressing food insecurity in the community. CFSI hosted biweekly “**Sustainable Table**” webinar series in April 2021 with live and interactive food demonstrations, and introduction to community partners that support sustainable food systems.

Educate & Empower: A wide array of recipes of plant-based meals are made available online on [CFSI website](#) that also include wealth of relevant information to educate people on how to incorporate healthy alternatives in their food habits and lifestyle. Local Farmer’s Market information, food facts and food demos are shared with campus community using social media platforms: Instagram ([@utrgv.cfsi](#)) and Facebook ([@utrgv.cfsi](#)).

Future plans in 2021 include developing innovative culinary education programs open to the public and featuring delicious plant-based food products.

“Sustainable Food Systems” is at the core of this initiative and every effort is made to use locally grown produce (during growing season) and locally sourced produce (during off season), and compostable kitchen waste is transported to the university farm, **Hub of Prosperity**. The initiative is currently subsidized by UTRGV in the form of student employment.

To sustain this initiative and to continue serving the RGV community through this initiative we appreciate donations from generous donors.

Visit: <https://give.utrgv.edu/greatest-need> and select Campus Food Security Initiative (CFSI) from the dropdown menu to donate.