



Nutri-Facts

Issue #18, September, 2002

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Greetings all!

We are fortunate to live in a country where, for most people, food is plentiful and accessible. On average, we spend about 11% of our disposable income on food. According to the US Department of Agriculture, the annual per capita food expenditure in the U.S. is approximately \$2,900. However, a large percentage of that money is spent on foods eaten away from home.

Recent events in our economy have caused many individuals to look for ways to save money. The grocery bill is one place where most people could make one or more adjustments. Think about it - if you could save \$20 a week on grocery store expenditures, that would add up to more than \$1,000 over the course of a year. What could you do with an extra \$1,000?

This issue focuses on ways to reduce grocery costs while getting the most nutrition for your dollar. Some of the suggestions are pretty simple. In fact, we probably do them already. Other ideas for reducing grocery bills may be new but they are definitely reasonable.

As always, I appreciate any comments/suggestions for future issues of Nutri-Facts.

Eat Well,
Jenna

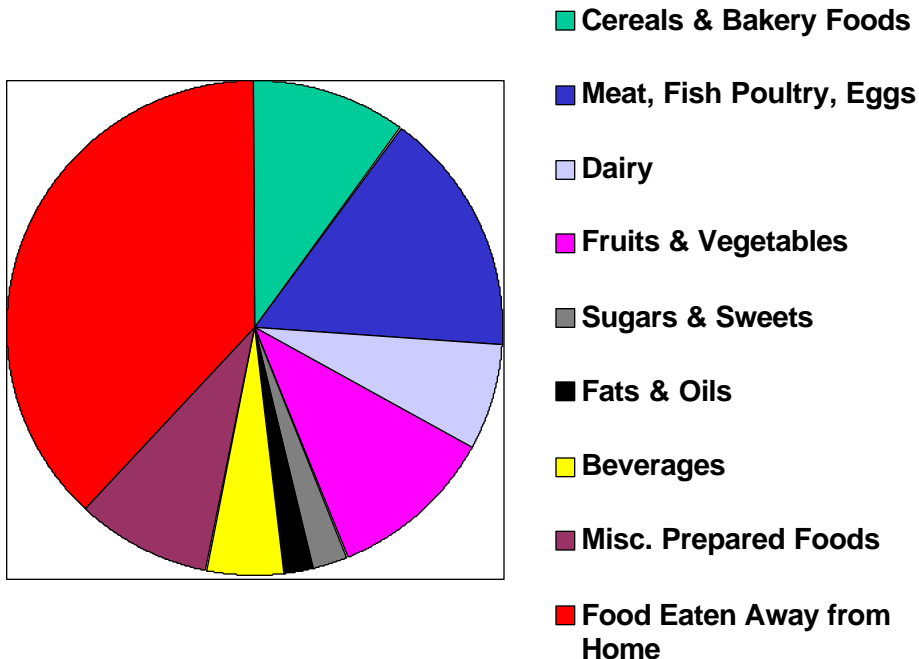
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How are we spending our food dollars?

In 2001, Americans spent approximately \$2900 per person on food (consumed at and away from home). This represented about 11% of our income.

According to the USDA, food expenditures are a product of several factors including household size, household income, ethnicity, age, and location. Want to know how we are spending out food dollars? Check out the graph below (based on 1998 data which is the most recent available):

Where our food dollars went (1998)



Note: MFPE = Meat, Fish, Poultry and Eggs (includes Pork); beverages **do not** include fluid milk. This graph does not include the estimated per capita expenditures for alcohol which is \$114 or 6% of the total budget. For a more detailed look at food expenditures, please go to the following link: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/consumption/Expenditures.htm>

Food Purchasing Practices of Consumers - What are we doing to save money???

According to the Food Marketing Institute's (FMI) *Trends in the United States - Consumer Attitudes and the Supermarket, 2000* report, nearly 70% of consumers surveyed identified price as a very important factor when selecting food. Only taste ranked higher (89%). The FMI also found that consumers were making an effort to stretch their food dollars. Nearly one in three shoppers checked supermarket ads, 22% stocked up on bargain items, and 20% used coupons.

While these findings were encouraging, the FMI noted that this was a decline in comparison to previous years. Furthermore, 23% of consumers surveyed reported that they never used coupons, 25% didn't compare prices at different supermarkets, and 24% never looked in the newspaper for grocery specials.

Frequency of Economizing Practices by Shoppers

	Every Time	Fairly Often	Occasionally	Never	Not Sure
Participate in Supermarket Frequent Shopper or Savings Club Programs	27%	14%	17%	39%	3%
Look in newspaper for grocery specials	30	24	23	24	**
Stock up on bargains	22	37	32	9	**
Use cents-off coupons received in the mail or from newspapers and magazines	21	22	34	23	**
Use cents-off coupons received at the store such as those on the shelf, or those given at the checkout register	12	20	44	24	**
Compare prices at different supermarkets	20	23	32	25	**
Buy products on special	13	36	43	6	**
Go to supermarkets other than the principal store for advertised specials	7	21	46	27	**
Use mail-in rebates for cash refunds	5	10	35	50	**

** Less than 0.5 percent

Source: *Trends in the United States - Consumer Attitudes and the Supermarket, 2000*

Lowering the Grocery Bill - Tips to Save and Maximize the Food Dollar

How can we shop smart and save money when we are at the grocery store? Below are 25 ways that we can trim our grocery bills and get the most out of our food dollars. Feel free to be flexible in which suggestions you use in your programming efforts. The appropriateness of these suggestions may very well depend on what is available in your county and the audience you are working with.

1. **Take an inventory.** Every few months, take an inventory of the foods you have available in your pantry and freezer. Use that as a starting point for planning meals. Too often we buy foods, put them away and forget about them. Remember, money you have tied up in food is money that cannot be used for other expenses so it is important that the food we buy be used.

2. **Plan your meals.** Knowing what you are going to prepare for meals and snacks helps you plan your shopping list. If you know what you have planned for a meal and you have that food available at home, you may be less inclined to eat out.

3. **Take a tip from Santa Claus – Make a list and check it twice.** Spend some time writing down the things you need from the store. Having a written list of what you need helps you stay focused at the store, can help reduce impulse buys and can help ensure that you will get everything you need so you don't have to make multiple trips to the store.

4. **Study grocery store ads before shopping.** If you know what is on sale before you go to the store, you can plan your meals to get the most out of your food dollar. If rice is on the menu but potatoes are on sale and would make an acceptable substitute, then go with the spuds!

5. **Compare prices with unit pricing.** Unit price is the cost of an item per unit such as per ounce, slice, pound, etc. By looking at the unit price, you can compare costs of similar items that may be packaged in different size containers. For more information on unit pricing, check out the Extension publication "Best Buys with Unit Pricing," E-15 at <http://texaserc.tamu.edu/catalog/topics/Foods.html>)

6. **Bend, stoop and stretch your way to lower food costs.** Store brands of popular food items (which are usually less expensive than national brands) tend to be placed on lower shelves, leaving the higher-priced national brands at or close to eye level. Many store brands are equal in quality and taste to national brands. Plus the savings can be significant. Make an effort to try one store brand each week. You may be surprised at how good they taste and the savings they have to offer. For example:

	National brand	Store brand	Savings
Cream of mushroom soup	\$0.89	\$0.79	\$0.10
Peanut butter (28 oz)	3.09	2.59	0.50
Macaroni and cheese (box)	0.79	0.50	0.29
Oatmeal (one-minute; 18 oz)	1.96	1.19	0.77
Long grain white rice (1 pound)	1.49	0.59	0.90
Flour (all purpose)	1.49	1.29	0.20
Diced tomatoes	0.99	0.65	0.34
Total Savings			\$3.06

7. **Don't shop when you are hungry.** Shopping when you are hungry increases impulse buying - and it is usually for foods that are not the most healthful. Eat a small snack before entering the store to curb both the appetite and the spending.

8. **When possible, shop alone and during times when the store is not crowded.** Young children have a big influence over the types of foods that families purchase. If possible, leave the kids at home to help avoid distractions and impulse buys. Also, shopping during times when the store is not crowded lets you get in and out of the store faster (see #9 for further explanation)

9. **Get in and out of the store as quickly as possible.** According to the Food Marketing Institute, supermarkets generate approximately \$130.00 in sales per labor hour. Theoretically, this means that for every minute we are in the store we spend about \$2.17. The longer we stay in the store, the more we spend. Staying focused and free from distractions can help keep spending down.

10. **Take advantage of loss leaders, but don't let them take advantage of you.** A loss leader is a product that is sold for less than what the store paid for in order to get customers into that store. The idea is that once they get the customer in the store, they will buy products in addition to the loss leader.

11. **Consider buying bakery items at thrift shops.** Thrift stores (for baked goods) sell breads, bagels, buns, rolls and other food items that are getting close to their “sell by” date. The foods are good quality and most items can be frozen for later use. Here is a sample of items found at a local thrift store in Bryan, Texas and how their prices compared to a nationally known grocery store located less than a mile away:

	Thrift store	Supermarket	Savings
Earthgrains bagels**	\$0.99	\$1.79	\$0.80
Grant's Farm Wheat bread	0.71	1.89	1.18
Roman Meal bread	0.79	1.69	0.90
Rainbo Hamburger buns	0.59	1.79	1.29
Savings			4.17

**The items listed above are for demonstration purposes only and should not be considered an endorsement by Texas Cooperative Extension.

Bonus: This thrift store had an in-store special: Buy 2 bags of bagels and get a third bag free. I bought 3 bags of bagels and 2 loaves of bread spent \$3.40. If I had bought these same items at the store, the cost would have been \$9.15.

12. **Check items that are reduced for quick sale.** For example, meat that is approaching the “sell-by date” may be reduced by as much as 50%. Use or freeze the meat immediately to ensure quality and food safety.

13. **Buy fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season.** Not only will you get the best price, you will also get the best quality. For more information about purchasing fresh produce, check out the following Extension publications: “Fresh Fruits: Getting the Most Nutrition for Your Money” (E-29) and “Fresh Vegetables: Getting the Most Nutrition for Your Money” (E-28) at <http://texaserc.tamu.edu/catalog/topics/Foods.html>

14. **Use convenience foods wisely.** In general, the more someone else prepares your food, the more you are going to pay for it. However, there are times when using convenience foods can be to our advantage, especially compared to the cost (both \$\$ and nutritionally) of eating out. Many grocery store chains have their own brands of mixes and meat helpers that rival the national brands - these are worth exploring if your family will eat them and if they are cheaper than preparing the items from scratch. Other types of convenience foods can be made a home for a fraction of the cost. For example, take yesterday's leftovers, freeze them into individual portions and you have your own t.v. dinners for work or for those nights when you don't want to cook.

15. **Cut back on foods with no nutritional value (i.e. soda, chips, cookies, candy).** On average, 12% of our food dollars (around \$209/year) is spent on cakes, cookies, doughnuts, pies, ice cream, colas, potato chips, desserts, and other types of foods that have little to offer nutritionally. In place of these items, offer fresh fruit, whole grain snacks, or even home-baked corn tortillas and salsa.

16. **Go meatless more often.** When it comes to food groups, meat tends to use the highest percentage of our food dollars. Try going meatless one meal a week by serving meals such as pasta with marinara sauce, vegetable lasagna, legumes, or baked potatoes. Cheese pizza (with added veggies) and salad is another menu idea.

17. **Weigh your pre-bagged produce.** Many supermarkets offer fruits and vegetables in 3, 5, and 10 pound bags. Remember, just because the bag says 3# doesn't mean that there are 3# in that bag. Weigh your bagged produce and choose the one that weighs the most. This will ensure that you are at least getting what you paid for.

18. **Buy juice as frozen concentrate instead of ready to use bottles or cartons.** A 64-ounce container of ready-to-serve orange juice costs \$3.49 (approximate unit price per ounce = \$.05). A 16-ounce can of frozen juice concentrate sells for \$1.79. Once you add 48 ounces of water to make 64 ounces, the unit price is about three cents. For maximum nutrition, be sure to purchase only 100% fruit juice.

19. **When possible, purchase non-food items such as pet food, cleaning supplies, or personal care items from discount stores.** Non-food items can be expensive in grocery stores. Just look at how much one can save buy purchasing non-food items from a discount store:

	Discount store	Grocery store	Savings
Hartz birdseed (10#)**	\$7.97	\$7.99	\$0.02
Hartz bird gravel (1 box)	1.37	1.69	0.32
Dreft (32 loads)	7.58	9.49	1.91
Gain laundry detergent (80 loads)	8.97	10.99	2.02
Pine-sol (48 ounces)	2.97	3.29	0.32
Joy dishwashing liquid (25 ounces)	1.67	1.89	0.22
Purina O.N.E. dog food (20# bag)	14.04	16.49	2.45
Glade plug-in warmer & refill	2.70	4.59	1.89
Edge shaving gel	1.87	2.79	0.92
Dep Hair gel	2.14	2.59	0.45
Angel Soft toilet paper (24 roll)	4.98	7.99	3.01
Dial hand soap (40 ounces)	3.50	4.79	1.29
Viva paper towel	0.98	1.19	0.21
Total savings			\$15.03**

** The items listed above are for demonstration purposes only and should not be considered an endorsement by Texas Cooperative Extension. If possible, purchase your non food items once or twice a month to reduce the number of trips made to discount stores. This may also help reduce impulse buys (such as those cute little baby outfits that seem to “jump” into the shopping cart all by themselves). Also, it is possible that there are store brands that are equal in quality to the national brands and that cost less, even when compared to the prices offered by discount stores. In most cases, a person can save money shopping at discount stores. However, if it takes a significant amount of time and gasoline to get to the discount store, then this may not be feasible for some individuals.

20. **Be cautious of buying clubs.** Buying clubs may not always have the best price. Plus, there is usually an annual cost to be a member, and many food items are sold in large quantities. Storing large quantities of food may be a problem for people with limited space.

21. **Stock up on sale items - only if you will use them.** Example: cream style corn is on sale at 5 cans for \$2.00. If you serve cream style corn only once every couple of months, just buy one can (\$0.40). If you have to buy 5 cans to get the sale price, buy only one can if your family wants it or choose another vegetable to serve. You may pay more than \$0.40, but you won't be stuck with 4 cans of cream style corn that you or your family won't be eating any time soon. Remember, money tied up in food cannot be used for other expenses. Also, remember that a sale is no bargain if the family will not eat the food.

22. **Use coupons wisely.** Some stores will double or triple coupon values. If these are coupons for foods you typically use, go ahead and save away. If you can use the coupons on foods that are on sale, that just makes the savings even greater. Keep in mind that even with coupons, store brands of selected items may be less expensive than national brands.

23. **When comparing the cost of meat, compare the cost per serving – not per pound.** Price per pound can be misleading because all cuts will not yield the same number of servings per pound. While boneless cuts of meat may cost more per pound, they may also be more economical because there will be less waste. Remember, the more bone and fat present in the cut of meat, the fewer number of servings you will get. To find out how many servings one can get from a pound of meat (pork, beef, poultry), go to the following publication “Buying Meat by the Serving” published by the University of Nebraska - Lincoln:

<http://ianrwww.unl.edu/pubs/foods/g947.htm#sp2fmc>

24. **Be sure to check the checker.** Although many supermarkets use scanners to ring up groceries, the price of fresh produce is usually based on a code entered into the register. Make sure that the code entered is the correct one for the produce you are buying. Also, if the register has not been programmed correctly, the scanner may ring up items incorrectly. Watch the register and check your receipt to make sure you are being charged correctly. Remember, checkers are only human and mistakes do happen.

25. **Don't waste food.** An estimated 25% of edible food goes to waste. Food that goes to waste is really money that is thrown away. Proper storage and use of leftovers can help reduce food waste. Still, we should never put thriftiness before food safety. If you think that a particular food is spoiled or not safe to eat, then the rule “when in doubt, throw it out” should be followed.

Ideas for Activities

1. **Take home activity:** For use with general audiences, empty-nesters, and families with children - not necessarily low-income (i.e. if you are conducting education programs at a food pantry/bank, this exercise is probably not appropriate).

Encourage your clients to take inventory of their pantries by writing on a piece of paper everything they have in their refrigerator, freezer, and pantry. This might be 3 cans of green beans, 2 cans of fruit cocktail, 4 cans of tuna, 1 bag of rice, and so forth. Once clients have taken inventory, encourage them to ask themselves the following questions:

(A) How much money do I have tied up in this inventory? To help clients answer this question, you could assume that all canned vegetables are valued at X cents, canned fruits are valued at Y cents, and so forth. Food prices vary across the state, so you would have to provide these numbers. Don't forget any meat that might be in the freezer! Keep in mind that this will give only a **rough** estimate of the amount of dollar amount tied up in food but it may get people thinking about how much money they have tied up in food. Remember, money that is spent on food cannot be used for other expenses. If that food goes to waste or is not eaten, then that money is lost.

(B) How can I “move” this inventory (i.e. incorporate the food into meals over the next week or month)?

Sometimes we just forget what we have in the pantry or freezer. Taking an inventory and posting it on the refrigerator door is a great motivator for using food at home, especially if one can tie a dollar amount to the inventory.

2. **Activity for Youth** - this would work great with a supermarket tour and helps sharpen those math skills! Have youth weigh 5 bags of bagged fruits and/or vegetables (i.e. weigh five 3-pound bags of apples, or 5 pound bag of potatoes, or 10 pound bag of potatoes, etc). Write down the weights on a piece of paper. What percentage of the bags weigh more than the stated weight? What percentage weigh less? How would this affect the stated unit price of the item? For example, if a 3 pound bag of apples costs \$2.49, then the unit

price would be about 5 cents per ounce. However, if the bag they pick weighs 2 pounds 10 ounces, then the unit price is not 5 cents, but instead 6 cents per ounce. Is this still the best buy? The lesson to be learned is that it is a good idea to weigh bagged produce to make sure you are getting what you pay for.

References:

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Trimming the Grocery Bill



Recent events in our economy have caused many individuals to look for ways to save money. For some, the grocery bill is a great place to start. Below are twelve tips for trimming the grocery bill to stretch and save food dollars.

1. **Take an inventory.** Every few months, take an inventory of the foods you have available. Use that as a starting point for planning meals.

2. **Plan your meals.** Knowing what you are going to prepare for meals and snacks helps you to plan your shopping list.



3. **Take a tip from Santa Claus - make a list and check it twice.** A written list of what you need helps you stay focused at the store, can help reduce impulse buys and can help ensure that you get what you need so you don't have to make multiple trips to the store.

4. **Study grocery store ads before shopping.** If you know what is on sale before you go to the store, you can plan your meals to get the most out of your food dollar.



5. **Compare prices with unit pricing.** Unit price is the cost of an item per unit such as per ounce, slice, pound, etc. By looking at the unit price, you can compare costs of similar items that may be packaged in different size containers.

6. **Bend, stoop and stretch your way to lower food costs.** Store brands are often found on the lower shelves but they are often equal in quality and taste to the more popular (and expensive) national brands.

7. **Don't shop when you are hungry.** Shopping when you are hungry increases impulse buying - and it is often for foods that are not the most healthful.

8. **Take advantage of loss leaders, but don't let them take advantage of you.** A loss leader is a product that is sold for less than what the store paid for in order to get customers into that store. The idea is that once they get the customer in the store, they will buy products other than the loss leader.

9. **Buy fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season.** You will get both the best price and the best quality.



10. **Use convenience foods wisely.** In general, the more someone else prepares your food, the more you are going to pay for it.

11. **Cut back on foods with no nutritional value (i.e. soda, chips, cookies, candy).** These foods use about 12% of our food dollars and offer little nutritionally.



12. **Don't waste food.** An estimated 25% of edible food is wasted. Wasted food is really money that is thrown away. Proper storage and use of leftovers can help reduce food waste.



Newsrelease

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, Americans spend about \$2,900 on food per person each year. Almost half of that money is spent on foods eaten away from home. Although many people may not think about their grocery bills or food costs, recent events in our nation's economy have caused many individuals to look for ways to curb their spending practices. For some, changing their food purchasing habits is a great place to start.

"Buying food is like making an investment," says Jenna Anding, PhD, RD, LD, nutrition specialist for Texas Cooperative Extension. "Since the money spent on food is essentially unavailable for other expenses, the goal is to practice smart food purchasing skills that enable us to get the most for our food dollar investment."

The most food or the most nutrition? "Both," says Anding. With an estimated 70% of Americans living from paycheck to paycheck, practicing smart shopping skills can help families stretch their food dollars before they break their bank accounts. Eating out less often is definitely one way to save money," says Anding. "Plus, research suggests that individuals who eat foods prepared at home have more nutritious meals compared to those who eat out, so not only are you saving money, but you are improving nutrient intake as well."

Planning meals in advance, making a shopping list before going to the store, and using coupons wisely are popular tips for saving those food dollars. But here are some other tips that may be new to you:

- ▶ **Take an inventory.** Meat sales. Canned food sales. We love to shop when there is a sale! Too often, however, we buy foods, put them away, and forget about them. Every few months, take an inventory of the foods you have in your pantry or freezer. Use these foods as a starting point for future meals. Anding even suggests taping this inventory to the front of the refrigerator to remind us of what we have available.
- ▶ **Check items that are reduced for quick sale.** For example, meat that is approaching the "sell-by date" may be reduced by as much as 50%. To ensure quality and safety, use or freeze the meat immediately.
- ▶ **Get in and out of the store as quickly as possible.** Supermarket patrons spend about \$2.17 for every minute they are in the store. The longer one is in the store, the more likely it is they will spend more than what they need. Staying focused and free from distractions can help us keep our spending down. "Shopping alone and during times that the store is not crowded can help shoppers maintain their focus," notes Anding.
- ▶ **Weigh your pre-bagged produce.** Many supermarkets offer produce in 3, 5, and 10 pound bags. Weigh your bagged produce and choose the one that weighs the most. This will ensure that you are getting what you paid for.
- ▶ **Buy juice as frozen concentrate instead of ready to use bottles or cartons.** A 64-ounce container of ready-to-serve orange juice can cost as much as \$3.49 (approximate unit price per ounce = \$.05). A 16-ounce can of frozen juice concentrate sells for as little as \$1.79. Once you add 48 ounces of water to make

64 ounces, the unit price is about three cents. Anding adds that "for maximum nutrition, be sure to purchase only 100% fruit juice."

Finally, Americans spend about 12% of their food dollars on foods that offer little nutrition but plenty of calories. These foods include potato chips, cookies, soda, and candy. "This represents more than \$200 a year for the average family," said Anding. Cutting back on these purchases can certainly help trim the food budget and maybe even our waistlines.

And that would certainly be a wise investment.

To learn more about reducing food costs, contact _____, county Extension agent at _____ (phone number).