

**A**re you a comparative shopper? Although careful shopping takes time, it can be time well spent, because food is one of the largest expenses in family living. And food prices are expected to continue their increase.

What can you do about it? One thing is to improve your shopping habits. Occasionally, take stock of how you shop. Are you a good shopper? How do you rate in the following areas?

- **Plan your shopping.** Make a plan for the food you will need during the period for which you are shopping. From this plan, make a list of the kinds and amounts of food needed.

When you get to the store follow your shopping list, making substitutions when you find lower-priced items that suit your menu. Avoid filling your shopping cart with "impulse" items from eye-catching displays.

- **Check newspaper ads for specials.** Food retailers offer frequent specials to attract customers. They reduce prices on foods that are in good supply and even, at times, on ones that are not. Planning some of your meals around the specials offered is a good way to stretch the food dollar. If your family likes an item that is on special, and if you have space to store it, you can save by buying non-perishables in larger quantities.

- **Compare stores.** Where you shop affects the value you get for your food dollars. Roadside markets may offer lower prices for fresh items during the summer season. Prices vary greatly among types of grocery stores. Small neighborhood convenience stores may charge more than the large markets. Warehouse-type markets often have lower prices, although at the expense of service or convenience.

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# Shopper's Survival Kit

Oregon State University Extension Service  
Extension Circular 984

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Usually you will want to do most of your shopping where the prices are lowest, but cost of transportation may influence your choice of stores. Traveling miles to get a bargain may not result in savings. Make as few shopping trips as possible in order to save time, energy, and transportation costs.

- **Shop when you are not tired or hungry.** If you want to cut down on your impulse buying, don't shop when you are hungry. And if you are tired, it is difficult to take the time to really compare products.
- **Read labels.** The label is the window to what is in the package. It gives the name of the product, the manufacturer, and the ingredients (which are listed in the order of importance). The label also may describe the quality of the food.
- **Compare brands.** Many supermarkets offer their own private-label brand of foods in competition with nationally advertised brands. You may save money by choosing the private label. Try different brands to find the quality that best suits your needs. Plain-label (generic-label) products, now in some supermarkets, are standard rather than a fancy quality. Eye appeal may be less, but nutritive value is the same. Cost is usually appreciably lower, and the quality may suit your intended use.
- **Match quality to use.** Top grades and premium packs of food cost more than lower grades and less fancy packs. To buy wisely, choose with the use in mind. If you plan to use canned tomatoes as a vegetable side dish, top grade, whole, well-colored tomatoes might be your choice. For use in spaghetti sauce, where the pieces of tomatoes lose their original shape, the least expensive grade will serve.
- **Evaluate convenience foods.** Convenience foods often cost more than their home-prepared counterparts. In addition, canned or frozen meat dishes or dinners usually have less meat than the same dish prepared at home. Busy homemakers, particularly those who work away from home, may find the added cost offset by the greater convenience. Be sure convenience really is offered. Some of the so-called convenience is simply the difference between opening the spice can and measuring out spices.

Some convenience foods are not more costly. For instance, frozen orange juice usually costs less than squeezing juice from fresh oranges. Evaluate and know what you are getting for your money—are you really saving time? And do you need this extra “maid service”?

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- **Buy in season.** When fresh fruits and vegetables are in peak supply, the prices are usually lowest and quality is highest.

The price of canned and frozen vegetables and fruit also varies with the season. Just before a new crop is processed, prices may go down.

- **Compare cost.** Compare the cost of various-sized packages. *Unit pricing*, now mandatory in Oregon supermarkets, enables you to do this easily.

- **Compare the cost per serving.** When you are comparing foods that have waste, the cost per pound is not the true cost. The more accurate guide is the cost per serving. To find the cost per serving, divide the retail price per purchase unit by approximate number of servings it will provide. For example, when you are comparing cuts of meat, consider the amount of bone and fat. Count on getting about four servings per pound from boneless cuts, two servings from bone-in cuts, and one from bony cuts such as spareribs.

The cost per pound, when comparing fresh vegetables with frozen or canned, also is not an accurate comparison. For example, if you were comparing the cost of frozen peas with fresh peas, you would need to know that you could get four servings from a 12-ounce package of frozen peas and two servings from a pound (16 ounces) of fresh peas.

- **Select lower-cost alternates.** Higher-cost foods usually have lower-cost alternates which have about the same food value. For example, chicken may be less costly than beef. Broccoli may be less expensive than brussels sprouts, bread less costly than fancy rolls, non-fat dry milk less expensive than fluid milk. Lower-cost, alternative foods can stretch the food budget without cutting nutritive value.

- **Consider home food preservation.** The availability of quality produce from home gardens and roadside markets may cause more people to consider home canning and freezing. Consider the increasing cost of commercially processed foods and the availability and cost of fresh, high-quality produce in relation to your available time and the cost of preservation equipment.