



Rhode Island Food Cost Study

Overview:

The Rhode Island Community Food Bank conducted this study over the past two years to measure changes in the cost of food for consumers in the state. A shopping list was created with foods that could be prepared at home to produce a week of meals for a family of four based on the nutrition recommendations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Items on the shopping list were priced at a local supermarket in July 2016, 2017 and 2018. In this study period, the cost of food increased by 15 percent. Most food items on the list increased in cost, and yet the average consumer may not be aware of rising food prices.

Method:

Menus were created for 21 meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) to feed a family of four for one week (see Appendix A). All menus met the daily food intake recommendations of the USDA’s My Plate Food Guidance System. A shopping list was then generated from the menus with the exact amounts of food needed to prepare each meal. During the same month (July) in three consecutive years, 2016, 2017 and 2018, shopping list items were priced at a supermarket in Rhode Island, with sale prices included (see Appendix B).

Results:

Food costs increased in each year of the study. The total cost for the shopping list was \$252.82 in 2016, \$279.77 in 2017, and \$290.69 in 2018. The increase from 2016 to 2018 was \$37.87 (15 percent). The cost increased for all categories of food, except dairy:

Food Category	2016	2017	2018
Grains	\$33.93	\$37.23	\$40.86
Protein	\$69.73	\$83.10	\$83.11
Fruit	\$57.03	\$61.74	\$70.87
Vegetables	\$48.04	\$56.92	\$51.53
Dairy	\$35.43	\$32.62	\$35.20
Other Food	\$8.66	\$8.16	\$9.12
TOTAL	\$252.82	\$279.77	\$290.69

The majority of items on the shopping list increased in cost from 2016 to 2018. Of 71 items on the shopping list, 45 (63%) increased in cost, 12 remained at the same price, and 14 decreased in cost. The average price increase per item was \$1.02.

Conclusion:

A study of food costs in Rhode Island found an increase of 15 percent in two years. Even though the price for most items on our shopping list increased, the average consumer may not be aware that they are paying more for the same food. Consumers purchase different items on each visit to the supermarket and prices vary when supermarkets place items on sale, making it difficult to track price increases over time.

Limits of the Study:

The main limitation of the study is that it was conducted at one supermarket. A more comprehensive study conducted at several supermarkets and grocery stores would yield different prices that could be averaged. The study was also conducted in July of each year, whereas a study in each month of the year could determine if there are seasonal differences in food costs. In addition, prices in Rhode Island and New England may be higher than in other parts of the country.

Appendix A: Weekly Meal Planner

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Sunday	Scrambled Eggs Whole Wheat Toast Low-Fat Cottage Cheese 100% Orange Juice	Chicken Breast Romaine Lettuce Tomatoes Cucumber Low-Fat Mozzarella Cheese Apples Whole Wheat Crackers	Meatloaf Roasted Potatoes Peas Sliced Pears Dinner Rolls Fat-Free Milk
Monday	Whole Wheat O's Cereal Vanilla Fat-Free Yogurt Strawberries Blueberries Almonds	Grilled Cheese on Whole Wheat Bread Steamed Broccoli Grapes Fat-Free Milk	Pasta Sauce Ground Turkey Whole Wheat Spaghetti Romaine Salad with tomatoes
Tuesday	Oatmeal Banana Fat-Free Milk	Peanut Butter Pita Chips Low-Fat Mozzarella Cheese Celery Sticks Apples	Ham Black Beans Brown Rice Low-Fat Cheddar Cheese Steamed Carrot Pineapple

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Wednesday	Omelets with broccoli and low-fat cheddar cheese 100% Orange Juice Whole Wheat Toast	Hummus Whole Wheat Crackers Baby Carrots Snow Peas Almonds Raisins Fat-Free Milk	Fish Tacos on Whole Wheat Tortillas Lettuce Tomatoes Low-Fat Cheddar Cheese Corn Mango Slices
Thursday	Bagels Hard Boiled Egg 100% Cranberry Juice Banana	Turkey on Whole Wheat Bread Low-Fat Swiss Cheese Lettuce Tomatoes Cucumber Vanilla Fat-Free Yogurt	Pork Loin Green Beans Applesauce Dinner rolls Fat-Free Milk
Friday	Whole Wheat O's Cereal Fat-Free Milk Blueberries Orange slices	Whole Wheat Tortilla Wrap with tuna salad Low-Fat Swiss Cheese Lettuce Tomatoes Grapes	Beef Tips Mushrooms Egg Noodles Broccoli Fat-Free Milk
Saturday	Whole Wheat Pancakes Turkey Sausage links Strawberries Fat-Free Milk	Low-Fat Cottage Cheese Cantaloupe slices Watermelon slices Celery Sticks Pita Chips	Roasted Chicken Brussel Sprouts Baked Sweet Potato 100% Cranberry Juice Low-Fat Vanilla Frozen Yogurt

Appendix B: Shopping List and Prices in Each Year of the Study

Product	Amount	2016 Cost	2017 Cost	2018 Cost	2016 to 2018 Change
Grains					
Brown Rice	1/32oz bag	2.39	2.69	2.79	.40
100% Whole Wheat Bread	2/16oz bags	1.98	3.98	3.98	2.00
100% Whole Wheat Bagels	1/22oz bag (6 count)	2.99	2.99	2.99	0
Whole Wheat Crackers	1/12oz box	3.89	3.99	3.99	.10
Dinner Rolls	Dozen	2.99	2.99	3.19	.20
Whole Wheat O's Cereal	1/18oz box	4.49	4.79	4.79	.30
Rolled Oats/Oatmeal	1/18oz package	1.79	1.99	2.09	.30
Whole Wheat Tortillas	2 packages (20 count)	4.98	5.18	7.18	2.20
Egg Noodles	1/12oz bag	.99	1.19	1.29	.30
Whole Wheat Spaghetti	1/13.2oz box	1.45	1.45	1.49	.04
Whole Wheat Pancake Mix	1/35oz box	2.99	2.99	3.29	.30
Pita Chips	1/8oz box	3.00	3.00	3.79	.79
Protein					
Eggs	2 dozen	4.98	3.98	3.98	-1.00
Ham	2/12oz packages	6.00	11.98	12.38	6.38
Turkey Sausage Links	1/16oz package	4.49	4.49	4.09	-.40
Black Beans	1/16oz bag dry	1.79	1.79	1.49	-.30
Pork Loin	1lb	5.49	5.49	5.49	0
Chicken Breast	1/2.5lb package	8.73	8.73	9.48	.75
Beef Tips	1lb	5.99	5.99	5.99	0
Turkey Breast	2/7oz packages	5.00	7.32	6.38	1.38
Canned Tuna	2/5oz cans	2.58	2.58	2.98	.40
White Fish	1lb fresh tilapia	6.66	6.99	7.19	.53
Ground Beef	1lb	5.24	6.99	7.49	2.25
Ground Turkey	1lb	2.99	4.99	4.49	1.50
Almonds	1/9oz bag	4.79	5.29	5.49	.70
Hummus	1/10oz tub	3.00	3.50	3.00	0
Peanut Butter	1/16oz jar	2.00	2.99	3.19	1.19

Product	Amount	2016 Cost	2017 Cost	2018 Cost	2016 to 2018 Change
Fruit					
100% Orange Juice	1/59oz bottle	3.00	4.19	4.19	1.19
100% Cranberry Juice	1/60oz bottle	3.49	3.15	3.99	.50
Apples	1/3lb bag	4.99	4.49	3.99	-1.00
Oranges	1/4lb bag	5.00	5.49	6.99	1.99
Bananas	8 count	2.39	2.65	2.65	.26
Grapes	4lbs	7.96	11.96	11.96	4.00
Strawberries	2/16oz packages	5.98	6.98	7.98	2.00
Blueberries	2 pints	5.98	5.98	9.98	4.00
Cantaloupe	1 melon	2.99	2.50	3.59	.60
Watermelon	1 quarter melon	1.99	.89	2.19	.20
Raisins	1/12oz can	2.99	2.49	2.59	-.40
Mangos	2 medium	2.00	2.50	2.00	0
Sliced Pears in 100% Juice	1/4pack	3.49	3.49	3.49	0
Diced Pineapple in 100% Juice	1/20oz can	1.99	1.99	2.09	.10
Applesauce	1/23oz jar	2.79	2.99	3.19	.40
Vegetables					
Lettuce	3 heads romaine	3.87	5.37	5.97	2.10
Tomatoes	7 medium tomatoes	6.93	5.53	5.53	-1.40
Cucumber	3 medium cucumbers	2.07	2.37	2.37	.30
Baby Carrots	1/32oz bag	1.89	2.69	2.59	.70
Sliced Carrots	2/16oz frozen bags	2.00	3.18	3.18	1.18
Onion	1 small	1.29	1.29	1.29	0
Mushrooms	2/8oz packages	3.98	3.78	5.18	1.20
Bell Pepper	1 red bell pepper	1.25	1.39	1.00	-.25
Potatoes	3 medium white potatoes	2.37	4.47	2.37	0
Sweet Potatoes	4 medium sweet potatoes	3.96	5.96	3.16	-.80
Brussel Sprouts	2/16oz frozen bags	3.00	3.18	3.18	.18
Peas	1/12oz frozen bag	1.09	1.09	1.09	0
Snow Peas	1/8oz bag	3.99	3.99	3.99	0
Green Beans	1/32oz frozen bag	1.89	1.89	1.89	0
Corn	1/16oz frozen bag	1.09	1.09	1.09	0
Broccoli	2/16oz frozen bags	2.00	2.18	2.18	.18
Celery	2 bunches	3.98	5.98	3.98	0
Pasta Sauce	1/24oz can	1.39	1.49	1.49	.10

Product	Amount	2016 Cost	2017 Cost	2018 Cost	2016 to 2018 Change
Dairy					
Fat-free Milk	2 gallons	7.38	7.38	5.98	-1.40
Fat-free Vanilla Yogurt	2/32oz tubs	4.00	3.58	3.98	-.02
Low-Fat Vanilla Frozen Yogurt	1.5 qt.	4.29	3.00	4.29	0
Low-Fat Cottage Cheese	3/24oz tubs	8.97	8.97	10.77	1.80
Low-Fat Mozzarella Cheese	1/8oz bag	2.29	2.19	2.59	.30
Low-Fat Cheddar Cheese	2/8oz bags	6.00	5.00	5.00	-1.00
Low-Fat Swiss Cheese	1/8oz bag	2.50	2.50	2.59	.09
Other Foods					
Mayonnaise	1/30oz jar	3.49	2.99	3.39	-.10
Tomato Paste	1 6oz can	.79	.79	.85	.06
Yellow Mustard	1 container	1.79	1.79	1.99	.20
Vegetable Oil	1/24oz bottle	2.59	2.59	2.89	.30