

Dates of Publication

Surveys are conducted quarterly:

March, June, September, December

Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska

June 1998

20 Communities Surveyed

Up to three stores in each of 20 communities were surveyed during March of 1998 for the cost of a specific set of food and non-food items. The 104 food items selected were taken, with some modification, from the USDA Low-cost Food Plan which is itself based on a nationwide survey of eating habits of Americans, conducted in 1977-78. In addition, the costs of such items as water, propane and electricity were collected. All costs were adjusted to reflect local sales tax where applicable. Since Wasilla and Palmer were combined in this census, their differing sales taxes were averaged when calculating food costs.

The estimated prices of unavailable food items in various communities were calculated as the expected cost as judged from the prices of all available items relative to the price of those items in Anchorage. The percent of foods unavailable in each community are shown in the survey.

Weekly food consumption rates for a family of 4, children 6 - 11 years, form the basis of the expressed food costs. All other costs are ratios of that cost as calculated from the USDA Cost of Food at Home survey issued June, 1998. The cost for this family of 4 can be calculated from the table by summing the individual members. For smaller families such a sum would be too low and should be adjusted up by 20%, 10% or 5% for families of 1, 2 or 3 persons respectively. Similarly, the sum for larger families would be too high and downward adjustments of 5% and 10% are suggested for

6 and 7 or more member families. These adjustments reflect that some economies may be realized when preparing foods for larger families.

Rows 18 through 22 represent historical food costs. The Anchorage column is a comparison of present to previous Anchorage costs. Similarly the U.S. Average column represents changes in U.S. average prices. A one (1) appearing in the Anchorage column indicates that the current Anchorage cost is 1% higher now than at that date. Therefore, rising food costs are indicated by positive values. The remaining columns are each community's cost relative to Anchorage at that date. For instance, a cell containing a one (1) indicates a community that was experiencing a food cost 1% higher than Anchorage at that date. Note that the dollar value of the U.S. Average is not included in this survey since the methodology is not equivalent.

Figure 1 shows the weekly cost of food plotted against community size. The peculiar distribution of costs are somewhat linearized when reexpressed on logarithmic coordinates as shown in Figure 2. Logarithmic coordinates are useful for comparing widely ranging numbers. Logarithmic coordinates on a single axis alone does not linearize the plot, although the major improvement in the readability is due to compression of the horizontal axis. If Anchorage (pop. 226,338) and Portland (pop. 508,500) are eliminated from the analysis, the horizontal axis expands to reveal that communities from 100 to 10,000 have rapidly declining food costs with increasing population size. The smaller communities are not homogenous, it appears that small communities in the proximity of Anchorage, Fairbanks or Juneau enjoy relatively low food costs. Alaska population sizes were taken from U.S. Census statistics produced by the Alaska Department of Community & Regional Affairs and posted at Alaska Web Sites (alaskan.com/namesedd.html). The Portland figure was posted by Portland State University

(www.osl.state.or.us/wksmtmain/city4.html).

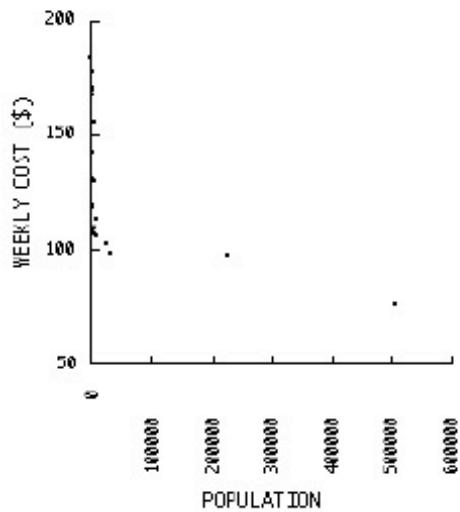


Figure 1. Weekly food costs plotted as a function of community size

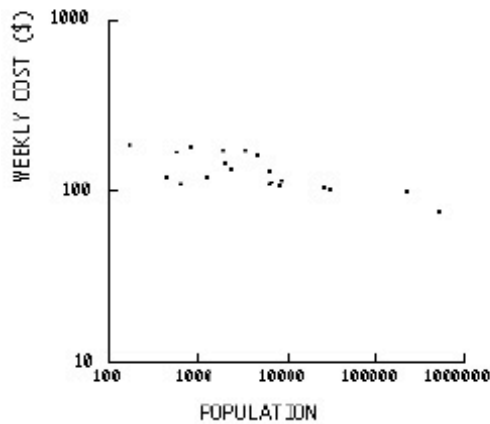


Figure 2. Weekly food costs and community size expressed on logarithmic coordinates

Further information on the USDA survey is available from the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion at www.usda.gov/fcs/cnpp.htm. To see the results of Alaska Cooperative Extension's Food Cost Survey on the world wide web, point your browser to: www.uaf.edu/ces/fcs.