



Dates of Publication
Surveys are conducted quarterly:
March, June, September, December

Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska March 1999

23 Communities Surveyed

Up to three stores in each of 23 communities were surveyed during March of 1999 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 February 1999. 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.

Food prices in rural areas may be influenced by a 36% increase in bypass mail rates in Alaska, effective January 10, 1999. It is important to note that the communities included in the survey are selected by region and population density. It has not been possible to get surveys from all areas of the state, especially in the arctic. Food prices tend to reflect overall costs in a community, the highest costs shown in the present survey are far below the known highest food costs in the state. Some of the utilities were removed from the survey because the figures were redundant or did not represent a common entity. For consistency, only #1 heating oil was priced regardless of prevalent weight use in a given community. Number 2 heating oil tends to be less expensive but is either unavailable or cannot be used in all settings.

To see the results of Alaska Cooperative Extension's Food Cost Survey on the worldwide web, point your browser to: <http://extension.uaf.edu/ace/fcs/fcs.html>.

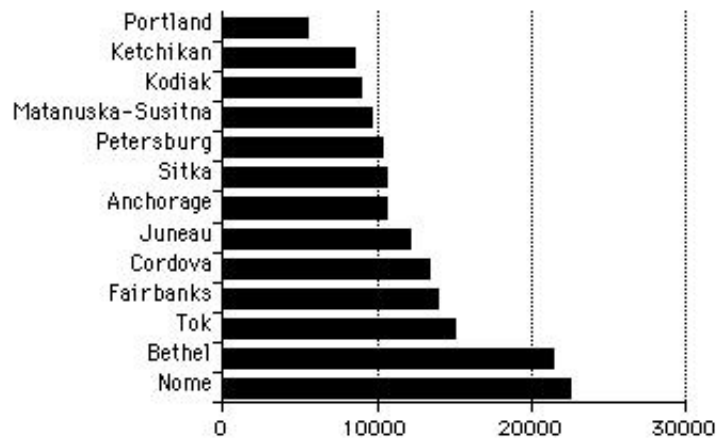


Figure 1. A relative ranking of annual heating costs calculated as the product of annual heating degree days and the per gallon cost of #1 heating oil.

Figure 1, a sketch of heating costs around the State, was developed by combining climate data (Fig. 3.18, Weather Data for Alaska and the Lower 48 States in "Northern Comfort, Advanced Cold Climate Home Building Techniques", The Alaska Craftsman Home Program, Inc., Pub.) with the current survey. In effect, the values are the product of annual 'temperature stress' that a home faces (termed heating degree days (HDD)) multiplied by the cost of #1 heating oil in that community. Factors such as wind and home design were not considered. Assuming that a temperature stress is met by burning heating fuel, the figure can be used to compare the relative cost of heating a theoretical home in various communities. As it happens, the cost of heating oil and HDD were essentially unrelated, some communities with considerable temperature stress enjoy low oil prices while others do not. HDD is generally sensitive to the proximity of the ocean and latitude, while oil costs are sensitive to production, transportation and market considerations.

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