



# Extension News Column

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If it's on sale, should I stock up?

Though we all love a sale, there are some limits to stocking up. If it is a really good sale, I usually stock up, but there are times when stocking up can cost you money. It might be when you look at the pantry and realize that you have enough shampoo for five years, and no place to store groceries. It is time to analyze whether it was wise to buy so much. If you use one bottle of shampoo a month, you might consider buying enough to last from six months to a year. There will probably be another sale over the next year to stock up again.

Let's say a brand new mouthwash is out on the market. Since you've never tried this label before, don't waste your money buying the large, economy size -- even if it's on sale -- you may not like the product. Try a smaller size before investing the money in something you may not like. One more note on this, if it is a new product, there may be coupons to encourage you to try the product. Check for coupons before you go to the store and apply them on the smallest size of the product available. If you like it, then stock up.

Be sure that you include all the costs of buying in comparing prices. If you have to drive across town to save money, it may not pay off. The cost of gasoline may eat up any savings you might receive. If I have to drive five miles to save 50 cents on a gallon of milk, it isn't worth it. In my vehicle, it would take half a gallon of gas, considerably more than the savings. But if I have several products I am saving on, it might pay off.

What happens when you get to the store and they're sold out of the particular product you need? Always take the original advertisement with you. Check the fine print -- it might say something like "limited to stock on hand," or "available only at certain locations!" If the ad isn't marked as limited, ask the store for a rain check. They will make products available to you at a later date when they replenish their stock for the same price.

Sometimes, the store may offer a substitute product of the same or greater value. Whether you get a rain check or a substitute product, you still win.

Storage is an important part of saving money. Not only do you need to have space available, but do your research to see what the shelf life is. Obviously, paper products can be stored in a cool, dry place indefinitely.

Perishables are a different story. Canned fruits are usually fine for up to two years, but canned vegetables can last from three to five years. Check for expiration dates. Frozen foods vary depending on what type it is. The best information can be found by consulting Cooperative Extension or by checking the "use by" date. Generally, meat can keep six to 12 months at zero degrees (ground beef and processed food should be kept for less than six months). Fish can be good for six to 9 months and vegetables are good for 12 months without a problem. If you have questions about the shelf life of a product, give us a yell at 474-2426 and we can tell you how long it will keep.

Don't buy it just because you can save money. Be sure it is something you will use. Otherwise, it will end up spending many months (even years) sitting on a shelf.

On another subject, we are talking about pinching pennies of a total different sort — not those in your family's budget, but rather those in the university budget. As you know, I work for the Cooperative Extension, a part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks that is dedicated to helping people live better at home. We teach classes, write publications and newspaper articles, and work with people to help them learn how to grow a garden, preserve their food, develop their children's potential, and in general, improve their family life. Here in the Tanana District, we have 11 people who are dedicated to help you learn the life skills you need to have a productive and healthy life.

During the upcoming month, we are doing some soul searching. We are working with other Extension personnel from 10 different locations across Alaska to plot our course for the future. In an effort to get more for your tax dollars, perhaps you would like to help us plan the future of Cooperative Extension.

We are conducting a survey to see what subject matter our clients feel we need to be offering and those areas in which we need to work more closely with our clients. The survey may be accessed at our Web site at [www.uaf.edu/ces](http://www.uaf.edu/ces) or you can get it in paper form. Call the office at 474-2420 and we can mail it to you or drop by the office at 1000 University Ave. for a copy.