

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

## **Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska**

### **March 1997**

#### **20 Communities Surveyed**

Up to three stores in each of twenty Alaskan communities were surveyed during March of 1997 for the cost of a specific set of 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. In addition, the costs of such items as water, propane and electricity were collected. All costs were adjusted to reflect local sales tax when applicable. 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 with children aged 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 March, 1997. 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. The historical food costs are given as percentages of Anchorage, March 1997. The food costs in March 1997 for most communities were estimated to be higher than in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Portland being the exceptions. The Portland survey is conducted by Alaska Cooperative Extension and is directly comparable to the Alaska communities. The remaining rows are taken from previously published issues of the Food Cost Survey. Small quarterly price fluctuations are commonly reported and probably result from the relatively small number of food items surveyed. The USDA reports the weekly US average for the cost of food at home, but these figures cannot be directly compared to the Alaska figures because of differing methodologies. Therefore, we have tabulated the percentage increases of the US average over previous weekly averages. Using this approach, it is seen that the cost of food in Anchorage has increased 8% since March of 1994, whereas the US cost has increased 10%. Whether these increases are representative for a particular household depends on how closely food consumption habits in that household match the expected habits upon which the surveys were based. The accompanying graphic shows the percentage increase in surveyed food costs in Anchorage (lower line) and the US average since 1979. The differences in these lines probably result from more stable pricing of the foods used in the Alaska survey relative to those in the US survey. Further information on the USDA survey is available from the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion and on the world wide web at <http://www.usda.gov/fcs/cnpp.htm>. It is important to note that the food costs presented here are based on a prescribed low cost diet plan. It is assumed that meals will be planned, that cooking facilities are available and few convenience foods are eaten. Each of the foods were priced for their lowest available cost regardless of packaging or brand. To see the results of Alaska Cooperative Extension's Food Cost Survey on the world wide web, point your

browser to:<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/fcs>

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