

Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska

June 1999

23 Communities Surveyed

Up to three stores in each of 23 communities were surveyed during June 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 June, 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.

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

Figure 1 groups communities by food cost and is a useful tool when speculating about the pressures that influence the cost of food throughout Alaska.

The question sometimes arises where specific nutrients can be found in Alaskan's diet. This issue of the Food Cost Survey addresses vitamin D. Vitamin D is a family of related fat soluble compounds that function in calcium and phosphorus nutrition.

Vitamin D is unique among vitamins in that it may not be required in the diet under some circumstances. The precursors of vitamin D are synthesized in the liver and skin, the precursors appearing in the skin may be modified by sunlight (certain ultraviolet colors of sunlight) to become physiologically useful.

In Alaska it is questionable that we have enough skin exposure to sunlight to produce adequate quantities of vitamin D even during the non-winter months. As a rule, at 40 degrees north or south of the equator (Seattle is 47 degrees north) sunlight is no longer sufficient as a sole mechanism for getting vitamin D for three to four months a year. In the far north (Barrow is 71 degrees north) sunlight may be inadequate for vitamin D synthesis in exposed skin six months of the year.

Historically what are the dietary sources of vitamin D? There are very few sources of vitamin D in nature but some examples include the flesh of fatty fish, fats and liver of aquatic marine mammals and eggs from chickens fed vitamin D fortified diets. A chronic shortage of vitamin D at any age can lead to serious bone problems. For this reason milk has been selected for vitamin D fortification. However, vitamin D is fat soluble so the amount of vitamin D found in non-fat and low-fat milks can be uncertain. All commercial infant formulas are fortified with vitamin D.