

A Larger Income Means A Larger Family Food Budget

The amount we spent for food last year — over \$100 billion — was nearly 50 percent higher than 10 years ago. Most of this was the result of population growth, which created more mouths to feed. But also at work was the amazing rise in personal income.

In 1959, the median family income, measured in 1967 dollars, was \$6,200. By 1967, the median family income had risen to over \$8,000.

A USDA survey bears out the axiom that the more we make, the more we spend — grocery buying included. People with higher family incomes spend more on food at the grocery store than those with lower incomes, even though they aren't necessarily consuming a greater quantity of food. So the rise in median income has probably resulted in some increase in the average amount that a family spends for grocery foods.

The survey determined how much families with different income levels spent for food. Food spending for use at home per family member increased 1 percent as family income rose 3 percent.

Recent statistics revealed a similar pattern nationally. Between 1959 and 1967, the average amount spent for food per capita rose by one-fourth, at the same time that average per capita income increased nearly one-half. The boost in retail food spend-

ing from rising incomes and a growing population has profited the farmer. About a third of the consumer food dollar represents the farm value of foods.

Also of importance for farmers, the survey found a decided pattern to the kinds of foods which the prospering family buys.

With more money to spend, shoppers choose costlier foods—such as steak instead of hamburgers, frozen peas in cream sauce in place of canned peas.

These choices, made with increasing frequency as income rises, increases the demand for certain costlier fresh forms of food and for more highly processed food items.

As income rises, spending for livestock products—meat, poultry, and dairy products—increases faster than spending for crop products such as fruits, vegetables, and cereals.

Among livestock products, spending for frozen and fresh forms—such as ice cream, shell eggs, turkey, and the like—increases much more rapidly than spending for canned, dried, or cured livestock foods.

Spending for fresh crop products—which include flour as well as fruits and vegetables—and dried and cured crop foods increased slowly with a rising income level.

However, the value of frozen crop foods in the grocery cart increased very quickly among

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more prosperous shoppers. Outlays for baked goods also rose fairly rapidly as the income increased.

Even though rising incomes seem to encourage rising grocery bills, Americans aren't spending a bigger part of their incomes on groceries. Incomes have risen so quickly that each year, a smaller fraction of all personal incomes is spent for food. Last year's \$100-billion food bill was a record low 17.2 percent of personal income after taxes.

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