

# Retail Grocery Prices Drop Slightly In Fourth Quarter Survey

PARK RIDGE, Ill. — American consumers enjoyed a slight decrease in retail prices at the supermarket during the fourth quarter of 2000, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation's (AFBF's) Marketbasket Survey.

The latest informal survey shows a 12-cent decrease in 16 selected grocery items from this year's third quarter.

Shoppers paid \$33.48 for the 16 items during the fourth quarter. That was a drop from last quarter's \$33.60, which marked the highest average since the survey's inception in 1989. This quarter's average is just \$4.98 higher than the inaugural average of \$28.50, recorded the first quarter of 1989.

The total average recorded for this year's fourth quarter report was 26 cents higher than the report for the fourth quarter of 1999 (\$33.22).

Of the 16 items on the survey, nine fell in price. A 32-ounce bottle of corn oil experienced the largest decrease, falling 22 cents to \$2.14. Other decreases included a 5-pound bag of flour,

\$1.24, down 16 cents; bacon, \$2.62, down 15 cents a pound; vegetable oil, \$2.04 per 32-ounce jar, down 12 cents; mayonnaise, \$2.86, down 4 cents per 32-ounce jar; ground chuck, \$1.86, down 4 cents per pound; cereal, \$2.84 per 10-ounce box, down 3 cents; white bread, \$1.16 per 20-ounce loaf, down 3 cents; and apples, 91 cents a pound, down 2 cents.

Seven items on the survey increased in price, led by a pound of cheddar cheese, which increased 26 cents to \$3.41. Other increases included sirloin, \$2.80 per pound, up 15 cents; pork chops, \$3.18 per pound, up 13 cents; a dozen eggs, \$1.04, up 7 cents; whole fryers, \$1.02 per pound, up 5 cents; whole milk, \$2.74 per gallon, up 2 cents; and potatoes, \$1.62 per 5-pound bag, up 1 cent.

AFBF, the nation's largest farm organization, conducts its informal quarterly Marketbasket Survey to help track retail food price trends to ensure they are in line with prices received by the nation's farmers and ranchers. While retail grocery store prices have increased for the most part

during the past year, the farmers' and ranchers' share has actually dropped. According to the Agriculture Department, the farm value of each food dollar

spent in the U.S. is approximately 20 cents. Off-farm labor at 39 cents is the largest component of the consumers' food dollar.

Volunteer shoppers from 32 states participated in this latest survey, conducted in mid-November.

# No Mad Cows Here

How can we be sure "mad cow disease" isn't in the United States?

Mad cow disease, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), gets a lot of press because there are so many unknowns about how it spreads, and because of the devastating effects of its human form, a form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. The fatal neurological disease is often painful, and often includes delusions or hallucinations as part of its development.

Classical Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) occurs at a rate of 1 or 2 cases per million people throughout the world, including the United States. However, in 1997, a new variant of CJD (vCJD) was found to be the same strain as BSE, and it's affecting much younger people than classical CJD. It's believed that people contracted this new variant by eating meat from BSE-infected animals.

Related diseases, such as scrapie in sheep and goats, appear to come from different strains of the protease-resistant protein, or "prion" — the agent responsible for the disease. Scientists are unsure about the exact nature of the prion, but it's very small and heat-resistant.

The vast majority of cases of vCJD have occurred in Great Britain, where more than 80 people have died from the disease. Most BSE cases have also occurred in Great Britain, where more than 175,000 head of cattle were diagnosed from late 1986 through mid-1999. At its peak in January 1993, almost 1,000 new cases were reported weekly. Today, only about 60 new cases are reported weekly.

No cases of BSE or vCJD have ever been identified in the United States, but it's not because we're not looking. In fact, scientists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant

Health Inspection Service routinely examine animals at high risk for the disease — those with neurologic conditions seen at food processing plants and veterinary diagnostic laboratories. The brains of about 10,000 cows have been tested since 1990, and none have tested positive for BSE.

Besides this and other surveillance efforts, the United States has banned the importation of any live ruminants (cows, sheep, goats and some other exotic animals) and their tissues from any country with confirmed cases of BSE. Also, in 1997 the government prohibited the use of by-products made from ruminants from being used in any ruminant feed. (It's believed British cattle got BSE by eating feed with rendered protein that was infected.)

More information on BSE can be found at the following website: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/bse/>.



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