

Consuming Thoughts

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Did you know that food costs can take up a large part of the family budget?

While food is a necessity, often steps can be taken to decrease the food budget without sacrificing taste and nutrition.

To plan low-cost meals follow these steps: Evaluate family food choices. Do you rely on convenience foods, often eat meals away from home, or frequently choose gourmet or specialty foods? Each of these habits can inflate the money spent on food.

Foods prepared from scratch are cheaper than their convenience counterparts. (Notable exceptions are orange juice and pancake and cake mixes.)

When you choose a convenience food, you are paying for the food, the labor of the person preparing it, and packaging. How many convenience foods could you replace with made-from-scratch versions?

Similar to convenience foods, the price of foods eaten away from home contains hidden labor and 'atmosphere' costs. If family members frequently choose meals at restaurants, cafeterias, or fast food places, you may want to reconsider these habits.

While gourmet and specialty foods can add excitement and va-

riety to your meals, they can also add dollars to the check-out-tape. Plain food may have to be the backbone of your menus for a while.

Watch the meat portions. Meat, fish and poultry are often the most expensive items on the dinner plate. Many Americans eat larger portions of these foods than is recommended. A total of 5 to 7 ounces of meat, poultry and fish per day provides all the protein needed by an adult. Growing teenagers need a little more and children need less.

Your dinner plate should be filled with more vegetables and starch foods (rice, noodles, pasta) than meat. Here are some portion sizes to help you estimate your protein intake. 1 egg = 1 ounce; 1/4 cup tuna = 1 ounce; 2 tablespoons peanut butter = 1 ounce; 1 slice prepackaged luncheon meat = 1 ounce; and a piece of meat, poultry or fish the size of a deck of cards = 3 ounces.

Plan your meals. By planning meals you can take advantage of grocery specials on meat, better utilize the food in your cupboards, and reduce the stress of deciding what to prepare each day. Also plan one meal to eat leftovers. Any food that is thrown out because of spoilage wastes money.

If your family despises leftover vegetables, place a jar or plastic container in the freezer to hold the leftover bits. When the container is full you can make soup!

Buy in bulk and cut your own. If you have a wholesale store nearby, or if your supermarket carries bulk foods, you can often save by buying large quantities.

Another potential savings lies in cutting your own meat and poultry. A top or bottom beef round can be purchased at many supermarkets and you can cut meat at home into roasts, steaks and stew meat. A whole chicken can be divided into legs, breasts, etc.

Instructions for cutting meat can be obtained from your local Cooperative Extension Office.

Specific suggestions for lower-cost foods:

- Meat, poultry and fish: Along with checking the price per pound, consider the amount of waste from bone and gristle. Also remember that although products such as hot dogs and cold cuts seem inexpensive, they contain large amounts of fat and sodium which may not be wise nutritional choice.

- Grain products: Breakfast cereals that are sugar coated, have added raisins and nuts, or have different shapes and colors tend to be higher priced. Stick with plain cereals and add your own nuts and fruits.

"Hot" breakfast cereals are generally cheaper than "cold" varieties. Try oatmeal or other cooked cereals once or twice a week. Buy plain rice and noodles, and add your own sauce (or use a can of creamed soup, but be aware of the extra fat and sodium soups can bring to your meal).

Look for a day-old or thrift bread store. With today's food

LMH FFA Members Attend Leadership Conference



Members of Lancaster Mennonite High School's Hans Herr FFA Chapter attended State Legislative Leadership Conference (SLLC). From left are: Jamie Nash, Dara Melrath, Philip Weiler, State Representative Katie True, Matthew Weaver, Kyle Hershey, and adviser Lem Metzler.

processing techniques, bread has little loss of quality during the first few days.

- Dairy products: Powdered milk can be used for baking and, along with evaporated milk, can be purchased with coupons or when on special buy and store for future use. Shop around of the best fluid milk price. Surprisingly, one-stop convenience stores often have the best milk price.

- Fruits and vegetables: Buy fresh produce when it is in season. If you have a farm market available, you may be able to save even more by buying in quantity and freezing or canning the extras.

Your local Penn State Cooperative Extension Office has information on seasonal produce and directions for home food preservation.

Well/Septic Tank Workshop Planned

WESTMINSTER, Md. — A presentation on "How Well Is Your Well and Septic" will be conducted on April 9 from 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. at the Carroll County Extension Office, 700 Agricultural Center, Westminster.

Do you know if your septic tank needs to be pumped out? Do you know where it is?

Thomas H. Miller, Regional Water Quality Specialist with the University of Maryland, Cooperative Extension will be giving a two-hour seminar/workshop for answers to these and many more pertinent issues for well and septic owners.

You must pre-register by mail or by calling (410) 386-2760. There is a charge of \$10.

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