

Dates of Publication

Surveys are conducted quarterly:

March, June, September, December

Cost of Food at Home for a Week in Alaska

September 1997

16 Communities Surveyed

Up to three stores in each of sixteen communities were surveyed during September of 1997 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. All costs have been adjusted to reflect local sales tax when 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 costs 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 and are shown on Table 1 and Figure 1. All other expressed costs are ratios of that cost as calculated from the USDA Cost of Food at Home survey issued September, 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 meals for larger families.

The historical prices are expressed percentages of the Anchorage value. The food costs in September 1997 for all Alaskan communities were estimated to be higher than in Anchorage. The Portland survey is conducted by Alaska Cooperative Extension and is comparable with the Alaska communities. The remaining rows are taken from previously published issues of the Food Cost Survey. Small quarterly price fluctuations are typical.

Although the USDA reports the weekly US average for the cost of food at home, these figures cannot be directly compared to the Alaska figures because of differences in methodologies. However, we have tabulated the percentage increase of the US average over previous weekly averages. These figures represent the apparent change in food costs in the US, as judged by the USDA methodology. Using this perspective, it is seen that the cost of food in Anchorage, according to the current survey, has increased 4% since June of 1997, whereas the US cost has increased 1%.

The first row (18) of the %Current/Historical columns is calculated as:

Any community current cost (CC\$) as % of Anchorage (AC\$) = $CC\% = 100 * CC\$ / AC\$$

Members of the first column of the %Current/Historical figures are the Anchorage current cost (AC\$) expressed as a percent of the historical Anchorage cost (AH\$), or 'how much have costs changed since a certain date', and were calculated as:

Anchorage current cost as percent of historical = $AC\%H = 100 * AC\$ / AH\$$.

The remaining members of the %Current/Historical columns are taken

directly from the equivalent of row 18 of previously published surveys. By looking down one of these columns it is possible to track food costs in a community relative to Anchorage's food costs. Ratios (past over present) of historical percentages can be used to determine if a community's costs are changing at a similar rate to those in Anchorage.

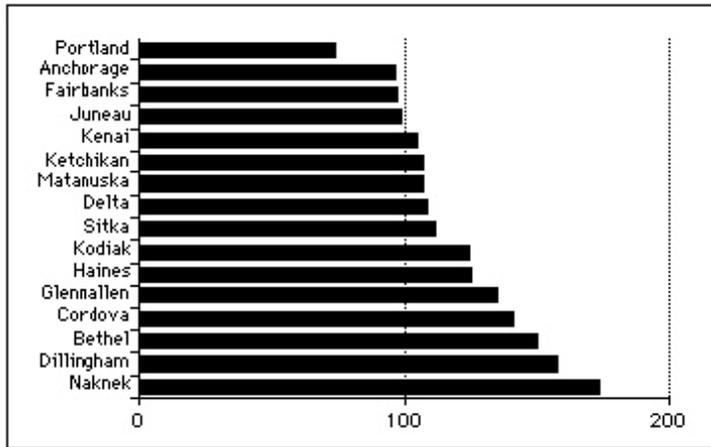
The actual dollar amount that appeared in previous surveys can be calculated as:

Community historical dollar cost (CH\$) = AC\$ * CH% / AH%.

In addition to food costs, representative values are presented for fuels, utilities and building materials. 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. It is worth remembering that this survey is based on meeting a defined menu and does not include the many items such as paper products and detergents commonly purchased at food stores.

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/coop-ext/fcs/fcs.html>. Further information on the USDA survey is available from the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion and on the world wide web <http://www.usda.gov/fcs/cnpp.htm>

Figure 1: Estimated food costs for September 1997



Submitted By:

Bret R. Luick, Ph.D

Foods & Nutrition Specialist/EFNEP Coordinator