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Americans Can Satisfy Dietary Guidelines for Vegetables and Fruit for Under \$2.50 Per Day

Federal dietary guidance advises Americans to increase their consumption of vegetables and fruit to meet recommended quantities and variety. Food prices, along with taste, convenience, income, and awareness of the link between diet and health, shape food choices. How much does it cost to meet the recommendations for vegetables and fruit?

The 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* advises individuals needing 2,000 calories per day to consume 2 cup equivalents of fruit and 2.5 cup equivalents of vegetables daily. ERS researchers used 2008 Nielsen Homescan data to estimate retail prices for 59 fresh and processed fruit and 94 fresh and processed vegetables averaged across package sizes, brand names, and types of stores. Average prices were adjusted for the removal of inedible parts and losses from cooking. When they applied these adjusted average prices, the ERS researchers found that, in 2008, Americans on a 2,000-calorie diet could purchase the quantity and variety of both fruit and

vegetables recommended in the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* for between \$2.00 and \$2.50 per day, or roughly 50 cents per edible cup equivalent.

Prices per edible cup equivalent varied widely between different types of fruit and vegetables. Fresh watermelon, at 17 cents per edible cup equivalent, sold for the lowest average price among the fruit, while fresh raspberries, at \$2.06, were priciest. A similar range of prices existed among the vegetables.

Processed fruit and vegetables were not consistently more or less expensive than fresh. Canned carrots (34 cents per edible cup equivalent) were more expensive to consume than whole fresh carrots (25 cents). However, canned peaches (58 cents) were less expensive than fresh (66 cents).



Hayden Stewart, USDA/ERS

The ERS researchers found that fruit and vegetables priced similarly at retail stores often varied substantially when priced in edible equivalents. For example, fresh broccoli florets and fresh ears of sweet corn both sold for around \$1.80 per pound at retail in 2008. However, the average price of sweet corn after boiling and disposing of the cob was \$1.17 per edible cup equivalent, compared with 63 cents for cooked broccoli florets.

Price differences reflect a variety of factors, such as prices at the farm gate, processing and other marketing costs, and losses from cooking and inedible parts.

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How much does an edible cup equivalent cost?			
Fruit	Dollars per cup equivalent	Vegetables	Dollars per cup equivalent
Bananas	0.21	Potatoes—boiled from fresh	0.19
Apples	0.28	Spinach—boiled from frozen	0.96
Applesauce	0.46	Corn, sweet—canned, whole kernel	0.37
Oranges, navel	0.34	Pinto beans—canned	0.38
Orange juice—frozen concentrate	0.26	Carrots, whole	0.25
Raisins	0.39	Tomatoes, grape and cherry	1.20
Pineapple—canned	0.49	Tomatoes—canned	0.41
Strawberries	0.89	Iceberg lettuce, head	0.26

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service analysis of 2008 Nielsen Homescan data.

This finding is drawn from . . .
How Much Do Fruits and Vegetables Cost? by Hayden Stewart, Jeffrey Hyman, Jean Buzby, Elizabeth Frazão, and Andrea Carlson, EIB-71, USDA, Economic Research Service, February 2011, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib71/

You may also be interested in . . .
ERS Data on Fruit and Vegetable Costs, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/data/fruitvegetablecosts/