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Recorder's Guide for Weekly Data Collection¹

Gigi DiGiacomo²

The object of weekly data collection is to track product availability, product prices, and seasonal variation among supplies for one year in six market locations (two farmers markets, two supermarkets, and two natural foods stores).

It is important to collect data on the same day each week (day to be determined by market and by state – these may vary from market-to-market). Use a new data sheet for each market location each week. If a product is unavailable for one or more weeks, leave this row empty on the *Worksheet* for that collection period. It is also important to record all brands and prices for each product on the worksheet. For example, if a supermarket stocks two brands of organic, whole milk you will need two rows to record each brand and its corresponding price (even if prices are the same). This will help us understand product availability, seasonal fluctuations in the supply of products, and the level of price variability. Several blank rows have been included in the *Worksheet* should you encounter more than one brand, origin or price for the same product and require additional space. Additionally, it may be necessary to incorporate new rows for farmer's market locations if there are more than a handful of vendors for each product. Over time, you will most likely want to customize the *Worksheet* to reflect the products and brands available in your market. If you do so, however, please always be on the lookout for new brands or products as they become available throughout the seasons.

For prices, please record the price/unit – this is the unit in which the product is sold (ounces, pounds or bags). After leaving the store or market, convert all prices/unit to a price/pound or price/1/2 gallon (in the case of milk). When “club card savings” or “weekly special” price discounts are offered, record the discounted price for the product. Moreover, when bulk discounts are offered (eg. “Three for \$5”) as is often the case at farmers markets, please record the price for a single unit (if available) and otherwise calculate the price for one unit based on the bulk discount price. For example, if 4 oz. blueberry containers are offered for \$2 each or 3/\$5, please record the \$2 price. If the \$2 price is unavailable, note the 3/\$5 and record \$1.67 in the price/unit field.

Additional *Worksheet* definitions and recording guidelines for each product follow.

¹ This *Recorders Guide* was developed to assist project participants with the collection of weekly price and product availability data for a coordinated set of case studies on local food supply chains that was funded by the USDA's Economic Research Service. The study report – *Comparing the Structure, Size, and Performance of Local and Mainstream Food Supply Chains*, USDA, Economic Research Service, ERR-99 – is available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR99/>. Results of the data collection are summarized in individual case studies: apples in Syracuse, NY; beef in Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN; blueberries in Portland, OR; spring mix in Sacramento, CA; and milk in Washington, DC and available at http://foodindustrycenter.umn.edu/Local_Food_Case_Studies.html.

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APPLES	
Category	Record prices for bulk apples of regular size only (no pre-bagged apples or “school boy” sizes). The only exception applies to farmers markets where apples may be pre-bagged in paper sacks or in peck-size containers (most farmers’ market vendors do not offer apples in bulk). If this case, treat the bagged apples at farmers markets as bulk product.
Product Description	You will be collecting prices for 3-4 apple varieties: (1) Red Delicious; (2) A “Top 15” variety; and (3) One or two “Local/Heirloom” varieties. Red Delicious apples should be available in most stores (though not in farmers markets). For the “Top 15” variety, choose one of the following apples which accounts for the most significant, year-round market share in your state: Braeburn, Cortland, Empire, Fuji, Gala, Ida Red, Johnathan, McIntosh, Newton, Northern Spy, RI Greening, Rome, Stayman, and York. This variety is to be determined by you and based on both market observation and conversations with a produce expert who is familiar with apple sales in your area. The “Local/Heirloom” variety is, again, to be determined by you and should represent one or two local varieties produced in your locale and not listed within the “Top 15.”
Unit	Record the price of apples/pound when possible. If you are purchasing bagged apples priced by the “Peck” or otherwise from farmers markets, be sure to change the unit accordingly.
Label	Record prices for apples labeled as “certified organic” and all others as “conventional.” Describe any other claims regarding production practices in the “Notes” section of your Worksheet. For example, some apples may be labeled as “Pesticide Free” or “Fair Trade Certified.” These apples should be treated as “Conventional” with the special claims listed as “Notes.”
Brand	It is not necessary to record brand or farm names for apples at any location.
Origin	Record the city, state or country in which the apples were produced.
Price/Unit	Record the price of apples/pound when possible. If you are purchasing bagged apples priced by the “Peck” or otherwise from farmers markets, you will occasionally need to purchase these bagged apples throughout the season/year and weigh them to determine the price/pound for the final data summary (all products, with the exception of fluid milk, will ultimately be converted to a price/pound).
Notes	Record any claims regarding production practices in this section of your Worksheet. For example, some apples may be labeled as “Pesticide Free” or “Fair Trade Certified.” This is also the place to note interesting observations about product prices, packaging or quality. Please note these observations and any other product claims clearly on the Worksheet. If you are unsure about whether or not to include something in the Notes, always do so – it is better to have too much information than not enough.

BLUEBERRIES	
Category	Record prices and product availability for all packaged blueberries (plastic containers most common).
Product Description	Record prices for fresh blueberries only (not frozen).
Unit	Most blueberries are sold by the ounce in either 4 oz. packages or 6 oz. packages. However, this may vary in your market. Record prices for one or more sizes when available.
Label	Observe and record prices for blueberries labeled as “certified organic” and “conventional.” Record any claims regarding production practices in the “Notes” section of your Worksheet. For example, some greens may be labeled as “Pesticide Free” or “Fair Trade Certified.” These blueberries should be treated as “Conventional” with the special claims listed as “Notes.”
Brand	Please record the brand when available.
Origin	Record the city, state or country in which the blueberries were produced.
Price/Unit	Same as “Unit” notes above.
Notes	Record any claims regarding production practices in this section of your Worksheet. For example, if you record prices for conventional, blueberries from Argentina that are also labeled as “Fair Trade” please record “Fair Trade” in the “Notes” section. The same applies to products which are produced according to third-party-certified, sustainable production standards such as those by “Food Alliance.” This is also the place to note interesting observations about product prices, packaging or quality. Please note these observations and any other product claims clearly on the Worksheet. If you are unsure about whether or not to include something in the Notes, always do so – it is better to have too much information than not enough.

LEAFY GREENS	
Category	Record prices for all bulk and packaged (bag or clamshell) greens (as defined in the "Product Description"). Be sure to circle the appropriate category (bulk or packaged) when recording prices.
Product Description	Collect data for two leafy green alternatives: "salad greens" and "green leaf lettuce." Salad greens are also called "spring mix", "baby lettuce mix", and "mixed lettuce" in different regions. If you encounter more than one of these mixes at a single location, record only the most commonly available mix for your state/region. If the mix you select becomes unavailable for several weeks, record one of the substitute salad green mixes and make note of this. For example, if you choose to record data for the "spring mix" and it is replaced by "field greens" in spring, begin recording prices for field greens at that location and note this on your data sheet. If spring mix reappears several weeks later, return to collecting the spring mix data. If you are uncertain about what mix to select, record data for several mixes initially. You can always eliminate those that are "temporary" or short-term substitutes. Green leaf lettuce, usually sold by the bunch, will be labeled as such and should NOT be substituted with Iceberg, Boston, Bibb, Red Leaf lettuce or Romaine.
Unit	Record the price of greens per ounce or per pound when possible. Initially, record the prices, brands and origins for all sizes available (eg. 5 oz, 6 oz, 1 lb). If the greens are priced/bunch, please be sure to note this in the "Unit" column.
Label	Observe and record prices for greens labeled as "certified organic" and "conventional." Record any claims regarding production practices in the "Notes" section of your Worksheet. For example, some greens may be labeled as "Pesticide Free" or "Fair Trade Certified." These greens should be treated as "Conventional" with the special claims listed as "Notes."
Brand	Record the brand of the distributor/shipper or the farm name where the greens were grown if available. It is not necessary to record farm names for leafy greens at the farmers' markets unless the vendors clearly are marketing a branded or packaged product.
Origin	Record the city, state or country in which the greens were produced.
Price/Unit	Record the price of greens per ounce or per pound. If the greens are priced/bunch, you will occasionally need to weigh bunches in the store to determine the price/pound for the final data summary (all products, with the exception of fluid milk, will ultimately be converted to a price/pound).
Notes	Record any claims regarding production practices in this section of your Worksheet. For example, some greens may be labeled with claims such as "Pesticide Free," "IPM Practiced," or "Fair Trade Certified."

FLUID MILK	
Category	Record prices and product availability for (waxy) cartons of fluid milk (not plastic containers or returnable glass bottles). If there are no half-gallons for a particular category packaged in waxy paper cartons, substitute either plastic or glass (in that order of preference).
Product Description	Record prices and product availability for whole milk and for low-fat, 2% milk. You will not be recording data for lactose-free or other specially-supplemented milk (such as Omega-3).
Unit	Fluid milk is sold in a variety of carton sizes. Please record data for ½ gallons. If ½ gallons are not available (perhaps at a farmers market), substitute the next-smallest size and record the data.
Label	Observe and record prices for milk labeled as “certified organic”, “natural”, and “conventional.” “Natural” is defined by USDA as a “product [which] contains no artificial ingredients or added color and is only minimally processed.” This claim will appear on milk labels as “From cows not treated with rBST/rBGH” or “Hormone and Anti-biotic-free.” The “Natural” claim may also be linked to production practices and specific claims about animal treatment. Treat all of these products as natural and record any claims regarding production practices in the “Notes” section of your Worksheet.
Brand	Record the brand of the distributor/shipper or the farm name where the milk was produced and/or processed. At farmers’ markets BE SURE to record the farm name as this will likely be a branded product.
Origin	Record the city, state or country in which the milk was produced or processed and distributed.
Price/Unit	Record prices/half gallon. If ½ gallons are unavailable, convert the price/unit to price/half gallon for final data entry.
Notes	Record any claims regarding production practices in this section of your Worksheet. This would include “From cows not treated with rBST/rBGH”, “Hormone and Anti-biotic-free”, and “Milk from cows that are pasture fed.”

BEEF	
Category	Record prices and product availability for fresh and frozen beef products (specified in the "Product Description"). For ground beef, please initially record prices for 80%, 85%, and 90% lean-ness until you are able to determine the most common product sold in your market/region.
Product Description	Record prices and product availability for pre-packaged products from the refrigerated case (i.e. not from the store meat counter) ground beef which is 80% or more lean (no patties) and for boneless, ribeye steaks. If products (such as ribeye) are not available pre-packaged in the refrigerated case, then you will need to collect data for products from the meat counter and make note of this on the Worksheet.
Unit	Ground beef will be priced/pound, however, ribeye steaks may be priced per ounce or per pound. Be sure to note the correct unit size when recording price data.
Label	Observe and record prices for beef products labeled as "certified organic", "grass fed," "natural", and "conventional." As with "certified organic" and "natural," the "grass-fed" claim is officially defined and regulated by USDA. Look closely at labels for this EXACT language. Only products that meet the USDA "grass-fed" criteria can be labeled as such. All other products should be treated as "conventional" if they are not labeled otherwise.
Brand	Record the brand of the processor or the farm name where the beef was produced and/or handled. At farmers' markets BE SURE to record the farm name as this will likely be a branded product.
Origin	Record the city, state or country in which the beef was produced or processed and distributed if available (this may be difficult to determine).
Price/Unit	Same as "Unit" notes above.
Notes	Record any claims regarding production practices in this section of your Worksheet. This would include claims such as "access to pasture" or "antibiotic-free." Please also make note of the percent of leanness for ground beef (eg. 80%, 85%, 90%).